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Arthur C. Clarke
Leslie Nielsen
Ty Templeton
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4 latest addition

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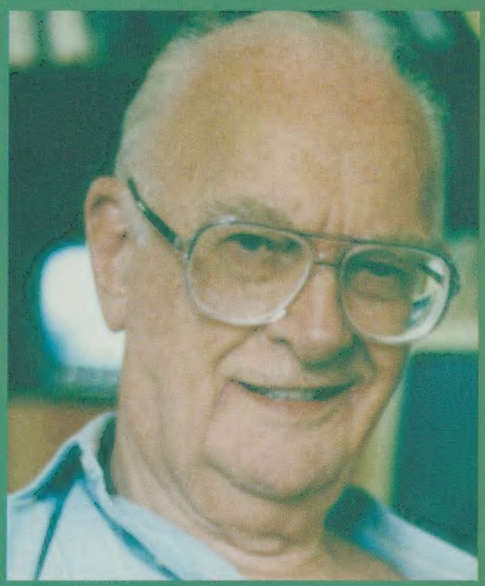
The Canadian actor looks back on his place in science fiction and horror (it wasn't always funny)

32 'HAL' of a year

Arthur C. Clarke reflects on the anniversary of a really scary computer



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PARSEC

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CHRIS KREJLGAARD
Publisher/Managing Editor

JOHN LAPPA
Production/Photography

DONNA KREJLGAARD
Advertising Co-ordinator

NORM MAYER
Italian property procurement

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS

James Armstrong, Ellen Ashton-Haiste, Brian Belfry, W. Ritchie Benedict, Peter Bloch-Hansen, James G. Boutilier, Gregg Chamberlain, Mici Gold, Janet L. Hetherington, Lars Johanson, JEL, Jon Mayall, Justin Mohareb, Jean-Pierre Normand, John Platt, Ronn Sutton, Emru Townsend, Stefan Valent, Greg Vaillancourt, Denis Valdron,

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e-mail: parsec@vianet.on.ca.
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Another convention season closes

It was like watching the final ballgame of the season.

The recent Primedia convention marked the conclusion of the major convention season in central Canada for 1997. Now fans, after spending three days sharing plans for the winter, telephone numbers and email addresses, dealers and organizers head for hibernation until June when Ad Astra kicks off the season.

This year, Primedia featured its traditional guests Robin Ward from the classic (although not for very complimentary reasons) Star Lost, Chris Wiggins from Friday the 13th (the series) and author Robert J. Sawyer, as well as Richard Biggs from Babylon 5.

But the flurry of new projects in the Toronto area also allowed the convention to feature appearances by the cast members from Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict — Von Flores, Richard Chevolleau, Lisa Howard and Leni Parker (see next issue for an interview with Parker).

It also included discussions led by the people behind Space: The Imagination Station which went on the air less than a month ago — a segment on the convention will also be included on an upcoming episode of SPiN.

Unlike other major conventions, Primedia covers a wide range of topics and covers the gamut of media-related areas. Each year, the convention features panels and workshops on movies, books, television. This time out, there were panels on feminism is science fiction and even the future of the genre in Canada (everyone agreed it has a good one).

This multi-faceted dimension makes it the ideal climax to the season.

Of course, the highlight of this year's edition was the Prix Aurora Awards.

The hour-long ceremony featured a tribute to Judith Merril — something that she would have abhorred according to Alan Weiss who delivered the moving tribute.

Weiss conducted the last interview Merril gave before her death in September. At more than one point in his address to the hundred or so people at the ceremony, Weiss had to stop and regain his composure before he could continue.

Among the winners of this year's Prix Aurora Award are:

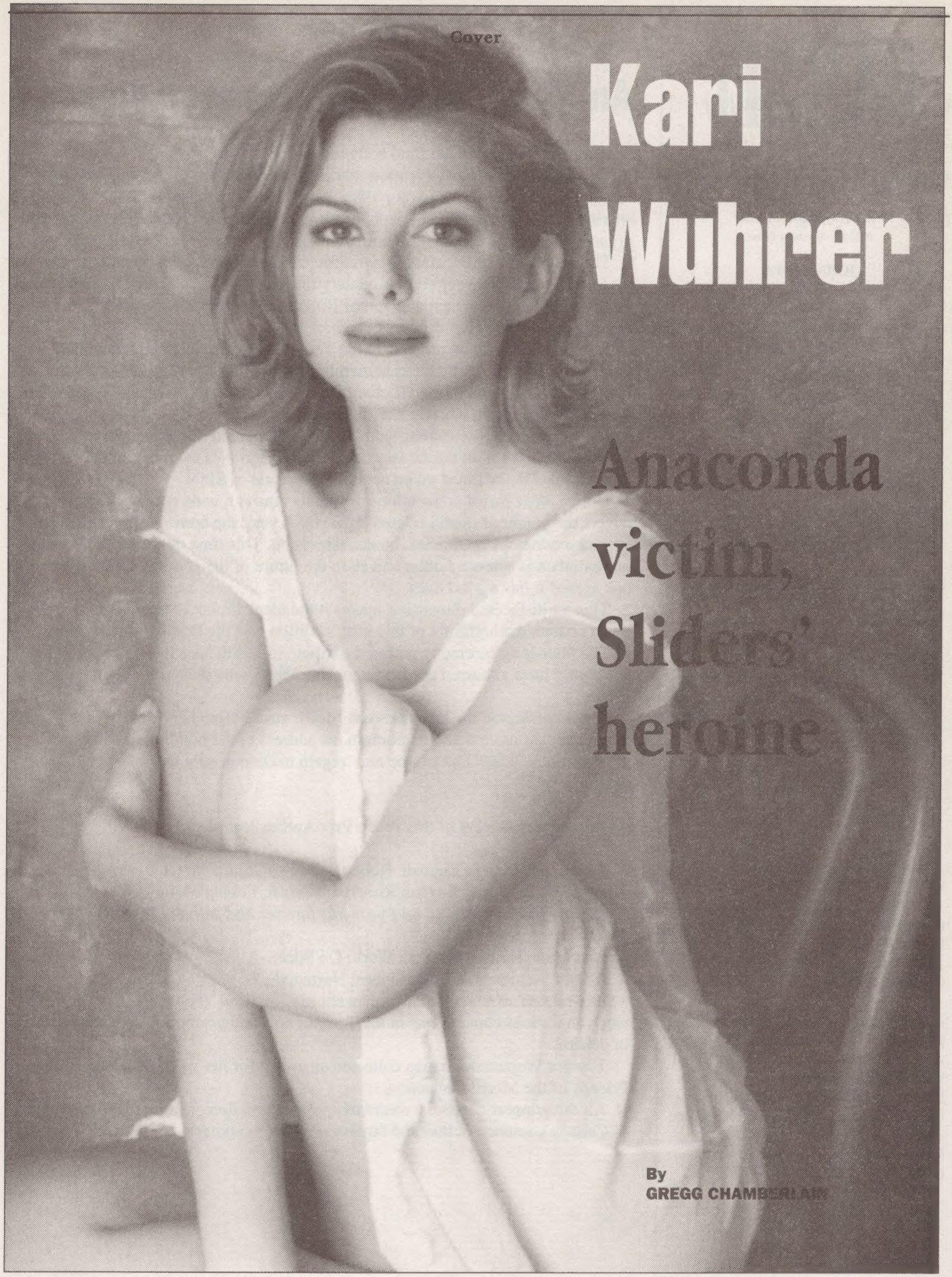
Best Long Form in English: Robert J. Sawyer, Starplex;
Best Short Form in English:Robert J. Sawyer, Peking Man;
(The twin wins broke an odd-year jinx Sawyer had suffered through since 1990)
Best Other Work in English Work: On Spec;.
Artistic Achievement: Jean-Pierre Normand.

Fan-related achievement awards went to Lloyd and Yvonne Penney for their work on various conventions in the Toronto area and promoting science fiction in general.

Theresa Wojtasiewicz also collected an award for her work on behalf of the Friends of the Merril Collection.

All the winners deserve a round of applause and demonstrate the true strength of Canada's science fiction and fantasy north of the border.

— Chris



Kari Wuhrer

Anaconda victim, Sliders' heroine

By
GREGG CHAMBERLAIN

Physical roles are nothing new for this veteran actress who joined the Sliders' cast in time for a fourth season

Photos © Universal Television

Universal executives must have been looking for a combination of strength, sexuality and innocence for the role of Capt. Maggie Beckett, says Wurher. Above, she shares a scene with Jerry O'Connell in World Killers, an episode from the current season.

It's all in the eyes.

Kari Wuhrer's one-page bio from her publicist uses phrases like "MTV vixen" and "sexy personality" to describe the actor who portrays the hard-as-nails Capt. Margaret "Maggie" Beckett, the latest addition to the sliders family.

Wuhrer's past work in the television and film industry includes a stint on MTV, the American music-video channel's game show, Remote Control, roles in Fox Network generation productions like Class of '96 and Beverly Hills 90210.

These roles opened the door to parts in such movies as Higher Learning, The Crossing Guard and Anaconda.

One of the reasons Wuhrer accepted a role in Sliders, and what she loves about her part, is that Beckett is different from all of the past roles for which she has become known and from the kind of female roles that she and her peers get offered.

"If you ask 90 per cent of actresses, you'd get the same answer—strippers and hookers. It seems like what Hollywood usually gears for us."

Wuhrer (pronounced "were") has had her share of stripper, prostitute and young-runaway-turned-prostitute roles and mused that Hollywood still seems to place more emphasis on the sexuality of women and the power women wield through their sexuality.

"That's why Maggie Beckett was such fun to play. She doesn't even know she has that power (sexuality). Which she does have, she's just not aware of it."

The role is also physically demanding. Beckett is a career military officer who could serve as a Special Forces publicity campaign to encourage women to enlist.

"I've always been in shape," Wuhrer remarked, adding that a lot of her past work demanded that she stretch herself physically, even to the extent of having to learn new things like dance routines. Much of her most recent work has involved getting literally knocked around sometimes.

> *They wanted me to play this really tough, strong, military woman who had this sexy undercurrent. Then, on the set, they gave me this military, un-sexy uniform.*

"When I did Anaconda, there were a lot of physical demands, and I've done a lot of physical stuff as Capt. Maggie Beckett. Lots of climbing, running, flipping over fences," she chuckled. "I get to show off."

Getting the part of Capt. Beckett came as a bit of a surprise for Wuhrer. Besides her earlier television work, she'd already starred in several movies when she got a call offering her to join the Sliders team.

"That was the first time that's ever happened to me." She thinks Universal Television executives must have viewed one of her demos and liked what they saw though she has no idea what, if any, specific one thing might have convinced them she would be right for the part. All she knows is that they saw her as Capt. Beckett.

"I think they wanted someone with the right combination of strength, sexuality and innocence." Wuhrer added that she tries to project all of those aspects as part she sees as making up Beckett.

The science-fiction premise of Sliders was another deciding factor for her joining the series.

"I've always liked the science-fiction and fantasy genre a lot. It really exercises me as an actor because it stretches my imagination a lot." Wuhrer also finds

that sci•fi projects like Sliders let her recapture her childhood sense of wonder.

Even though Universal wanted her to be Capt. Beckett, and she wanted to be Capt. Beckett, being Capt. Beckett was not a snap right off the bat. Besides the work involved figuring out what made the character tick, there were other issues that make Wuhrer smile when she recalls them.

> *Hollywood, as unforgiving as it seems, is forgiving. You get your chances.*

"They wanted me to play this really tough, strong, military woman who had this sexy undercurrent. Then, on the set, they gave me this military, un-sexy uniform. I said,'wait a minute, sexy undercurrent and you expect me to wear this?'"

Laughing, she said that everything worked out in the end and the best compliment came from her parents after they got to watch her in her new role.

"They said, 'wow, we watched the show and we forgot it's you.' Which is really great."

Wuhrer's character was introduced midway through the third season during the two-part The Exodus episode written by John Rhys-Davies during which Rhys-Davies' character, Prof. Arturo, is killed while helping a group of refugees escape from one alternate Earth to another before a wandering pulsar irradiates their planet. The first couple of episodes that followed saw Wuhrer trying to meld the hard military aspect of Maggie Beckett with her soft, sexy side. Wuhrer thinks that Sole Survivors and The Breeder crystallized Beckett as a person.

"By then (Sole Survivors), I was getting the hang of this." The episode's premise of a civilization plagued by living zombies provided ample opportunities for Beckett-as-soldier. The Breeder with its plot of an alien parasite infecting Wuhrer's character proved to be a 180-degree turnaround that opened the way for Beckett-as-siren to strut her stuff.

"This episode helped me find the other side of her." Wuhrer gave a lot of credit to Universal executives for letting her first try to figure out her character on her own, another new experience for her in television, one she's only had on small movie projects.

The question now is how much alike are Beckett and Wuhrer?

"We have one basic thing in common, Kari and Maggie," Wuhrer said, laughing. "We're both women." She herself in real life is more emotionally-charged than her Sliders persona. Whether that means Beckett is better able to repress emotions or else hasn't learned to express them well is something Wuhrer is still trying to figure out. She's found that the best source of inspiration for that particular aspect of her character is men.

"I got a lot from watching my husband (Daniel Salin)." She noted that sometimes a man, faced with an emotional situation, may show no expression but his eyes, in the way he seems to look at things, betray his real feelings." Wuhrer tries to portray Beckett in a similar manner.

"You knew there was something going on inside but she would never let you know." Now that Sliders has gained a fourth season thanks to the U.S. Sci-Fi Channel, Wuhrer's goal is to carry on with Beckett's emotional and psychological evolution.

"I'm going to do all I can to see that the writers continue her (character development) arc." She sees Beckett as becoming more like a civilian as far as learning to deal with her emotions, to be more open about them rather than try to hide them.

"To me, it's headed in an obvious direction but I'd like to see it done in a creative way. To be more of a woman but not any less of a strong woman." That also involves Beckett learning to deal with her feelings toward Quinn Mallory.

The seven episodes following after The Exodus saw Beckett and the rest of the Sliders pursue Col. Rickman from world to world. The original three members of the group had obvious reasons for chasing the colonel; his timer had the coordinates for their home world; guilt at letting the colonel escape after he killed Prof. Arturo who had uncovered the secret of his parasitic mutation; guilt for unleashing a menace on the alternate Earths. Beckett's motives, though, went far beyond just wanting vengeance on the man who killed her husband. "This Slide of Paradise," the third season finale, revealed that Beckett and Rickman had a brief affair after her husband became a paraplegic and before the arrival of the Sliders. Beckett's almost single-minded hunt for Rickman stems from guilt at betraying her husband and her marriage and from rage because the colonel robbed her of the chance to redeem herself by killing her husband.

"The one thing she felt guilty about was that relationship while her husband was a paraplegic. She was a little revenge-happy." Now with Rickman apparently dead, Beckett has to refocus.

"Now she's got a different mission." The problem, Wuhrer said, is that Beckett has to figure out what her new 'mission' is. "Which , of course, will put a whole new slant on her being."

Outside of Sliders, Wuhrer's other sf/fantasy-related work includes playing the slingshot-gypsy granddaughter in the film adaptation of Stephen King's novel, Thinner and co-starring

with Marc Singer in Beastmaster II: Beyond the Portals of Time.

Then there's Anaconda, which is basically a monster movie similar to Jaws in that the live actors play second-fiddle to the mechanical prop that the audience really wants to see. Wuhrer laughed at a suggestion that she was upstaged by a remote-controlled reptile.

"In this business you get to be happy playing the fiddle in any way. Second is not so bad when you're in a $50-million picture that will be seen all over the world."

One of her latest projects, Undertaker's Wedding, is like Sliders in that it's a real change-of-pace from the usual run of roles for Wuhrer. The Canadian production is a black comedy about two Mafia families and the undertaker who looks after their funeral needs. One of the mob bosses has the undertaker help him fake his death.

"I'm the mob boss' wife who ends up falling in love with the undertaker."

Wuhrer's career hasn't involved a lot of comedy though some roles have provided opportunities to inject a little humor. Given the chance, she'd like to do more comedy.

After 12 years in the acting business, starting when she was 14-years-old, Wuhrer is the first to admit that her career hasn't always been a roaring success. She's had her share of failures.

"I've done 21 movies now plus television. I'm waiting to come full circle." She began in live theatre in New York City and would like to perform on stage there again. Meanwhile, there's this singing career that she's also working on, another side of herself she enjoys exploring.

"I'm just starting to come into my own with that." She shrugs off any suggestion, though, that she is like a female version of Tim Curry who has made his mark as both an actor and a singer. She doesn't think her ability is even close yet, especially with his skill at combining musical talent with acting.

"I want my music and my theatrical careers to be separate. If I ever bring them together, I want it to be the perfect project." She doesn't see that working out just yet.

"I'm at a place where I see and hear around me enough to know what to put into my art to make people listen."

Her repertoire mixes pop, rock and roll and soul. She also loves Celtic folk music and enjoys listening to Vancouver folk/blues singer Ferron.

Wuhrer writes her own songs using an electric guitar for composition work. She also plays the recorder, an instrument she enjoys and which she tries to work in whenever she can as a solo instrument. "It's very fairy princess-like."

Some of her songs are by her musician/composer husband.

"He's written a couple of songs for me that are just perfect for what I'm doing."

Both of them help and provide mutual support for each other which is important when either one experiences a setback in their career goals.

Wuhrer also relies on her past experience studying drama at New York University and Columbia University's directors program and her time at England's Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts.

"The most I've learned is from working and interacting. I've had the chance to work with some really great actors." She thinks that the time Jack Nicholson spent assisting her work out a particular scene in The Crossing Guard, has been the biggest help in her career in the long run. It gave me the confidence to trust myself."

Asked what she does away from the sets and the recording studio to relax and she just laughs. There's not a lot of time for R&R time for Wuhrer these days. She and Daniel squeeze in what they can to spend together in between their various work-related projects.

"Right now we just bought a house and every spare minute is spent working on it."

Then there's the three cats they share space with and the pottery studio Daniel built for her where she spends a lot of time when she can. "It's really relaxing."

Outside of acting, her immediate ambition is "to make good records right now."

Beyond that?

"My long-term dream is to have a good career until I'm 100. I want to be recognized somewhere down the road as a good actor, a good singer/songwriter. I don't want to get the reputation that I suck."

Being true to herself is an important part of Wuhrer's definition of a good career. It matters a great deal to her that she always tries to do her best in whatever she's involved, regardless of whether she's on the 10 Best List or the comeback trail.

"Hollywood, as unforgiving as it seems, is forgiving. You get your chances." It's up to the individual, Wuhrer said, to recognize and act on those chances.

Wuhrer was prepared for the physical nature of the role of a production assistant who falls prey to the giant constrictor during an ill-fated documentary shoot in Anaconda.

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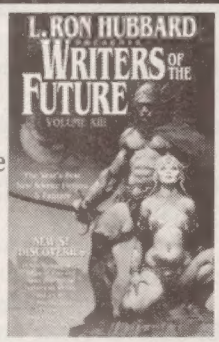

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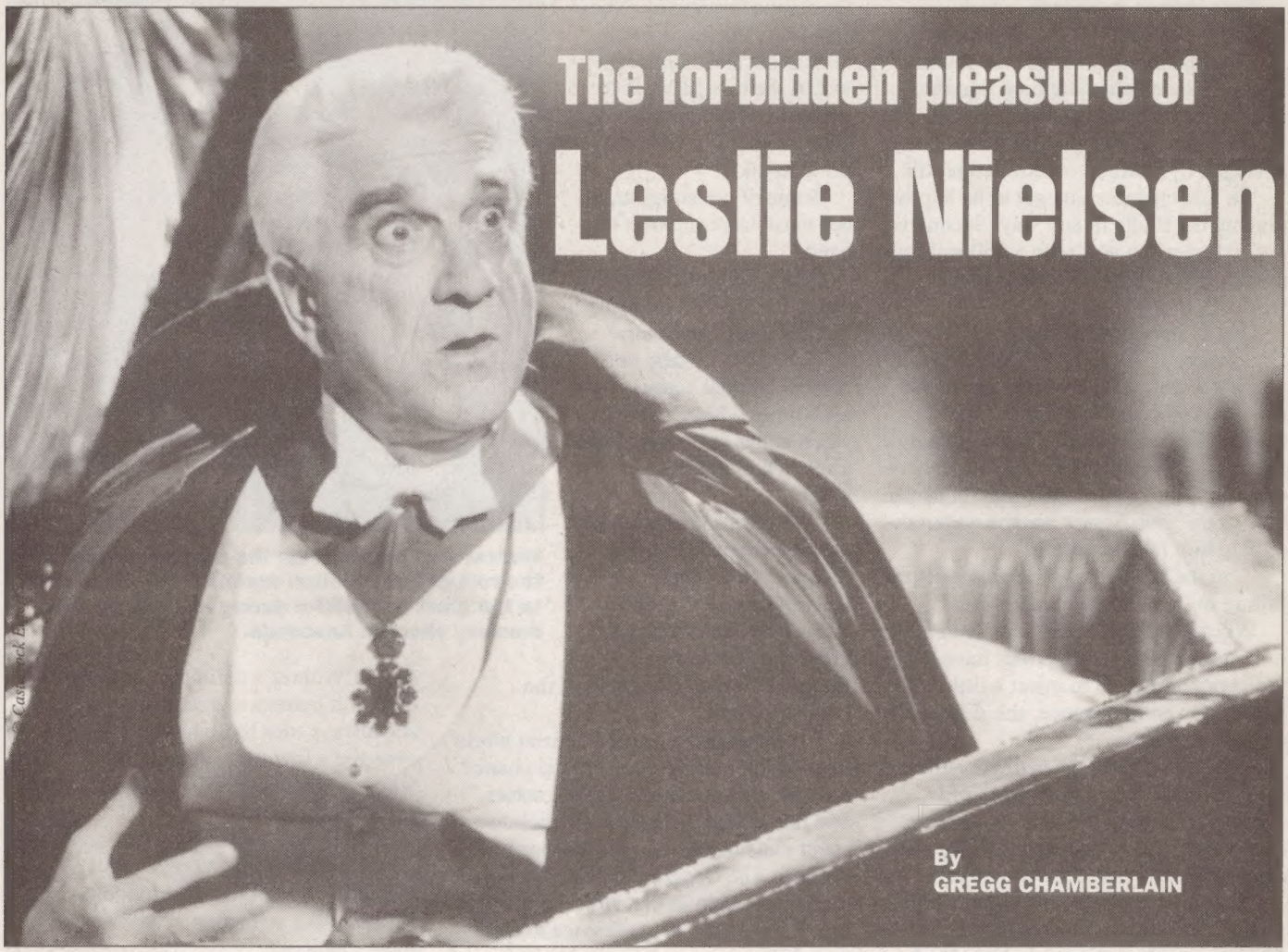


The forbidden pleasure of Leslie Nielsen

By
GREGG CHAMBERLAIN

My phone interview with Leslie Nielsen was set for 11 a.m. while he was in Vancouver for the filming of Mr. Magoo, the live-action movie based on the cartoon character. Trouble with the telephone on my end prevented me from getting in touch with the veteran Canadian actor for half-an-hour.

Part of the problem was that I kept mis-dialling and ringing the fax machine of the hotel where Nielsen was staying. The first thing I did after finally getting through to Nielsen was to apologize and explain why I was late getting in touch.

"Great Scott!" Nielsen exclaimed. "That sounds like something I would do. Are you sure you don't have a bit of Capt. Drebbin in You?"

We both had a chuckle. I knew, right then, how the interview was going to go.

Laughter is Nielsen's trademark these days. Mr. Magoo is the latest in a long line of comedy projects for him though it presents challenges that the Airplane spoofs or Naked Gun farces never did. There's the physical aspect of the role to consider. How does someone like Nielsen , tall, athletic, and a with a full head of hair, expect to portray Mr. Magoo, short, bald, and so near-sighted that he mistakes fire hydrants for his dog?

"I'm playing him bow-legged," Nielsen joked. His take on Quincy Magoo is to play the character the way the little man appeared in the original cartoons—A slightly bow-legged, elderly gentleman who talks to himself a lot.

Born the son of an RCMP officer, a childhood spent near the Arctic Circle during on of his father's many postings, schooled in Edmonton, and time served as a gunner in the Royal Canadian Air Force, Nielsen's early life almost reads like what many might imagine is that of the quintessential Canadian. One of his brothers, Erik, had even been involved in federal politics for 30 years while the other operates a small business.

Hard to believe that Nielsen's television and movie career was built on a reputation for portraying strong authority figures in some of the best series and movies to come out of the 1950s and 1960s. Starting with his appearance in 1950 opposite Charlton Heston in an episode of the Studio One anthology series, Nielsen has guest-starred on a regular basis in action dramas like Wagon Train, The Fugitive, Cannon and Kojak, plus, held lead roles on cop shows like the New Breed, as Lt. Price adams, and steamy soaps like Peyton Place, as Dr. Vincent Markham.

His movie career began in 1954 with Vagabond King followed by a variety of standard dramas and comedies until 1956 when he was cast as the commander of a spaceship in a science-fiction version of Shakespeare's The Tempest.

Forbidden Planet has earned the reputation as being one of the few true classic sci•fi films of the 1950s. Nielsen still has fond memories of the movie.

"I always look back on it," he said. "I was always a science-fiction fan and thought it was one hell of a script. It is as good today as it was then."

> I was always a science-fiction fan and thought it was one hell of a script. It is as good today as it was then

Nielsen allowed that some of the movie's narrative, like when a moon landing would take place, might be somewhat dated. No one in 1956 Hollywood ever thought that men would walk on the moon with the next 15 years. Yet Nielsen thinks Forbidden Planet can still hold its own against today's special-effects epics.

"It has become a classic, the granddaddy of them all. The one that spawned Star Wars, E.T., and I suppose, Star Trek. Forbidden Planet could have been the pilot for Star Trek."

While most of his work after Forbidden Planet was in straight drama, Nielsen returned now and again to sf/fantasy and horror, appearing in Prom Night (1980) and in George Romero's Creepshow (1982). These days, though, Nielsen can't seem to resist a sly wink and nod even when there's the devil to pay as demonstrated in Repossessed, his irreverent spoof of The Exorcist and Its imitators. His portrayal of Transylvania's most famous native son, in Mel Brook's Dracula-Dead and Loving It, probably put the final nail in the movie-remake coffin for the Lord of the Undead.

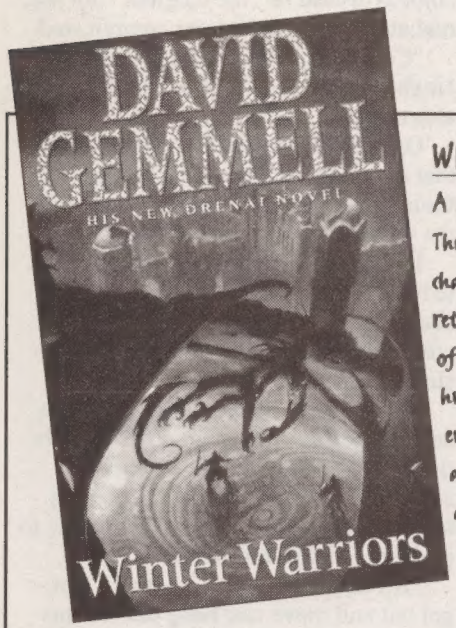
Still, Nielsen has a great deal of respect for the effort required to make a good terror movie. He recalled Creepshow as a "wonderful film" and its comic book-style framework story introductions "very imaginative and very well done" and a good artistic touch on Romero's part, given the overall subject matter—things that terrify people.

"I think horror films deal with compulsions and phobias. It (Creepshow) is just the kind of picture that will endure."

His take on Dracula, however, was strictly for fun. No big meanings at all.

"When we began we wanted to do a film where Dracula was the victim." Nielsen observed that the Count did end up the victim in more ways than one. The first eight minutes of the movie's introduction ended up on the cutting room floor during the final edit. Nielsen has no idea why what happened.

After talking with some of the production people involved



WINTER WARRIORS

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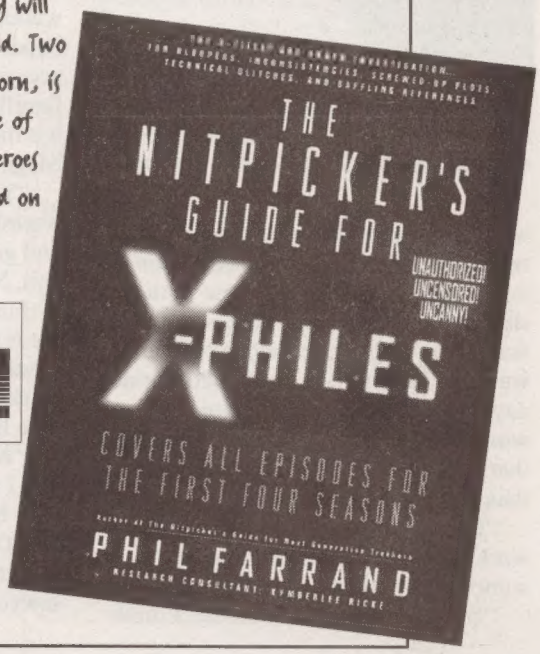

THE NITPICKER'S GUIDE FOR X-PHILES

Unauthorized! Uncensored! Uncanny!

by PHIL FARRAND

Scully and Mulder, you have reason to be paranoid. Armed with keen detective sense, attention to detail, and a VCR, author Phil Farrand has done some forensic work of his own - and dissected every technical foul-up, plot oversight, and alien intrusion on the X-FILES.

Photo by Peter Sorel; © Castlerock Entertainment

Two years ago, Nielsen tackled the role of Dracula. Now he turns his talents to another classic, Mr. Magoo.

with Mr. Magoo, the term "workaholic" seems like an appropriate description for the veteran actor. During some of the shooting in and around Vancouver, there was a one-week period when Nielsen was only supposed to on the set for one day. Instead he spent the entire week at work. He felt there were some things that needed to be done right then rather than left for later.

"It's sort of like when you're doing work around the house and you've hired someone. You just have to be there too.

"I'm not really a workaholic. I think I'm lazy. The priorities of work just dictated then."

He also likes a challenge, especially one he can have fun with. That's part of the reason why he chose to play Mr. Magoo even though the late Jim Backus, the voice of Mr. Magoo since the character's first appearance in Ragtime Bear, has become identified with the wizened old billionaire.

"He (Backus) is Mr. Magoo," Nielsen agreed. "It's almost a no-win situation." But he thinks there is still room to maneuver because of the way Magoo's movie debut has been written.

"It's on thing when you do a cartoon and another when you do a movie. The difficult thing is there must be a way to make Mr. Magoo a human character."

The feature film Magoo, he said, has to be more than a caricature of a near-sighted old man. For that reason, he didn't feel that just studying the original cartoons would work as a way to prepare for the role because they mostly played on Magoo's near-sightedness and his grumpy mutterings.

"How many times can you have near misses, bumping into doors, talking to fire hydrants and keep it funny?" For Nielsen, the challenge was finding ways to expand on the original character and make him more real and more sympathetic to theatre audiences.

"The main thing is to do a character that the audience will accept and like." Nielsen's own view of Magoo's basic personality should help viewers warm up to the garrulous old gentleman.

Most people familiar with the cartoon character, then, may identify Backus as the voice of Mr. Magoo but not as the walking Mr. Magoo. That, Nielsen, hopes is where his Mr. Magoo will find acceptance with both people who are familiar with the cartoon character and wit those who have no idea who Mr. Magoo is.

"You just hope your conception is warmly received, pleasing to everyone and go ahead and do your job." In the end, Nielsen said, "I'm having fun."

Fun is what drives Nielsen. With all the television shows and movies to his credit, most people might wonder why he doesn't simply retire, kick back and take life easy.

"What I find is, my life is a vacation and I keep discovering new things," It's why he still enjoys doing theatre work like Darrow, the one-man show based on the life of the famous American defence lawyer, of which Nielsen has bought the performance rights.

He spent part of 1996 performing Darrow across Canada. While working on Mr. Magoo, he made plans for hitting the road again wit Darrow, reading over the script and thinking about what changes he might make in how he interprets the character on stage.

"I think we fall accidentally into our jobs," he mused and suggested that may be as good an explanation as any for why he got into acting. For him it's a continuing voyage of exploration.

"I keep on discovering little things. I don't want to interrupt the excitement."

"I enjoy my work and I enjoy people. I'm not trying to do anything significant,"

He does prefer comedy more now than drama though he also enjoys being in a position to pick and choose whether to do another comedy like Mr. Magoo, gag lottery commercials, or serious work on the stage.

"That's where I feel so very lucky. At my stage of my career and my age, I say, 'Leslie, do you realize how lucky you are?' And I say, 'Leslie, answer the man.' And I say, 'Yes, I realize how very lucky I am.'"

Chuckling, he says that the easy response to questions about the appeal of comedy would be "the laughter" but the real answer is a little more complicated.

"Comedy carries with it two things: laughter and its extreme excitement and also danger."

One danger that any comic faces is that a routine or joke which he thinks is funny may fall flat. Another, is picking the wrong time to try to be funny.

In Nielsen's case, there doesn't seem to be much risk of either danger. He claims to have no real future goals, either in the way of new movies, television projects or stage work.

"I have a pat answer these days," he said, laughing. "I have no goals or ambition. I do, however, wish to work enough to maintain whatever celebrity status I have so that they will continue to invite me to golf tournaments.

"If I have nothing to do at all I just get out and move and hang out. At this stage, my life is a kind of gentle vacation. I'm a lucky man."

He offered a bit of advice and one final observation.

"Always sit down whenever you can," he said, laughing. "I don't want to grow up. I want to grow down."

☆

On the set: Future Fear

What appears on the screen is only part of the film-making process at Producers' Network Associates

By
PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

During a12-hour work day, when lunch is called, the studio empties quickly.

The cavernous, two-story tall concrete space, loaded with arcane-looking equipment, lights and cables, doesn't look anything like an underground research base. But an hour later, the film crew start filing back in; the lights go down, and like magic, we are catapulted into the next century, to the troubled earth of Future Fear.

Producers Network Associates' sixth Canadian feature is nearing its "wrap" date. Tomorrow, Stacy Keach will join cast members Jeff (Night Heat) Wincott and Maria (Dark Planet) Ford to shoot his pivotal and surprising role in this independent 'actioner' about protecting Earth from an alien virus.

Prominent stage director Lewis Baumander, who directed Keanu Reeves in Hamlet strides briskly across the set. Time is running out, and Baumander is running two full film units tonight. He talks to actors. People approach him with questions, leave with decisions.

In a rectangular pit, Production Assistants apply paint. A specialist pours pink liquid into the three large glass specimen tanks of a painted construction that will shortly be gleaming, futuristic, medical equipment while yet another rigs lights in its many dials. Nearby, while floodlights are positioned, a film camera is carefully aimed for a high-angle shot.

On closer examination, the pit walls are lined not with the wooden panels customarily used for constructing film sets,

Photo by Michael Gibson; courtesy of and © Producers Network Associates

Michael Pare, appeared as Daryl Boden in The Cusp, one of the half-dozen films produced by the Toronto-based film house. Producers Network Associates has become known for its science fiction and action movies.

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but with the lighter, three-ply corrugated cardboard used for moveable stage sets. Likewise, stretched across 40 feet or so of the studio floor, lie two rows of sturdy cardboard boxes, screwed together with the same three-ply cardboard. By tomorrow, these will be finished, painted, raised and assembled to form the steel corners of the pyramidal roof of the semi-subterranean Percifus facility where researchers struggle to defeat the lethal space virus.

An assistant director walks by speaking quietly into his headset: "Would Maxine like to see our 'dead body'?"

The specimen tanks light up, glowing obscenely in the dimness. A lab-coated actor rehearses in front of it, handling a small electronic device cryptically referred to as the 'PNA.' The business presents problems. He keeps practicing. The crewpeople keep painting.

In the far corner of the studio, a drab, grey construction of painted panels where a tense combat will occur receives the attentions of a small swarm of electricians and grips. Somewhere a switch is closed and the set is bathed in blue light, transforming it dramatically into a cramped underground corridor. Baumander nods terse approval, the crew evaporates and the actors appear, taking their first positions. Rehearsals. Walk-throughs. The director takes one last quick look, and retires to his seat before the video feed from the camera.

Then Wincott's Dr. Denniel steals slowly down the corridor toward the tiny room where his wife, martial arts expert, Maria, waits with a vicious-looking laser pistol. He does it again and again, until the shot looks just right.

Because the actors must stage a fight in the scene, fight co-ordinators, Paul Rapovski and Darren McGuire stand by. They joke. They rehearse the moves they've planned so carefully. Like so many in the huge, bustling room, they wait. Detail by tiny detail, the process of making a film goes on, late into the night.

Upstairs, producer, Philip Jackson sits down at his desk in his surprisingly small, unassuming office to talk about deal-making.

"The unfortunate truth is it's the deal first," he confesses, "the business drives the art.

"Though I personally like science fiction, we were not originally setting ourselves up as a sci-fi company. We were going to do television and other work. What happened was our first picture, Replikator did extremely well for the distributors. As of that moment, every distributor said, 'okay, we'll give you slightly bigger budgets,' but nobody wanted to hear anything from us that wasn't science fiction."

"In the 'B' movie market, which is an extremely tough market to be in," he continues, "Science fiction/action is the most reliable, predictable genre. All the others peak; they come and go. By the time you fund, produce, and bring a film to the market, you can't predict that market will still be at its peak. Sci•fi/action is a solid, reliable market. Even there, it's not a given that the distributors are going to recoup their investment. Once you've paid your stars, your banking, insurance, your financing costs, that's over half your budget. That's where a lot of the creativity comes in.

"So we decided we would produce the movies that the market wanted but that, subversively, we would try to make interesting movies, and care about the content, the production design, the writing and so on. And actually have a good time making movies that we would personally want to watch.

"On Replikator, we got a letter from a Pacific Rim buyer that said, "we notice that between page 17 and 32 of the script there are not very many big explosions."

So we had to write back and say the guards running up and down the corridors would be carrying very big guns. Jackson's

Photo by Michael Gibson; courtesy of and © Producers Network Associates

Michael Pare and Zerha Leverman, who portrays Rene Lessard in the Cusp, during a love-making scene in the anti-gravity room.

partner, Daniel D'or, who has just come in to speak about another matter adds, "when we send a script to the distributors, I think that the readers just run through the pages and say, okay, there's one explosion here, one action sequence here, and they don't know what it's about at all. The promo we've cut concentrates on the dramatic and storytelling qualities to satisfy the distributors, so it doesn't give a sense of the film's sophistication."

Another evident strategy in low budget film-making is to hire a big-name lead.

"In his film, we have Stacy Keach," boasts Jackson. "It took some time. Any negotiation for a star is always complex. They cannot make a deal that undermines their value in other negotiations. They don't want to take a script that doesn't support what their agents perceive that the market wants from them. Also there's a lot of second guessing of each other. We cannot sell a film without star names. Years ago you could. You also can't have a strong star surrounded by weak supporting people, but I'm very proud of the strong Canadian supporting people we have.

"One of the wonderful things about real science fiction," Jackson continues, "is the 'what if . . .' scenario. That always opens you to the possibility of real originality. In Hollywood, something original is something unknown, and therefore, dangerous. Yet to me, that's what the people who watch science fiction actually want — originality."

But science fiction is still a 'genre.' It's imaginative originality in creating alien societies and future worlds can be its greatest liability with general audiences.

"I don't think it puts anybody off," Jackson insists, "unless it's done badly. If you have a story that asks suspension of disbelief at one level, and a 'look' that requires suspension of disbelief at another level, then you have a problem of sincerity, and that's where you lose non-SF audiences. In Hollywood, you see a glossy film that looks kind of good, but lacks any integrity in its total vision. They don't think integrity and sincerity are important, but that makes a film that isn't any fun to watch."

For all that, S-F has plenty of its own cliches, and the villainous military, even moreso, a duplicitous military with a hidden, sinister agenda is certainly one. Films like The Abyss, Brainstorm, or even this year's Contact come to mind. Future fear film has such an element in Stacy Keach's General Wallace. Jackson addresses the charge.

"In Future Fear, what you have is a rogue unit. But one of the heroic figures is Lieutenant Pontaine. She's a military brat who believes in the military and the leadership of General Wallace, and he's the demon, a man with his own agenda. So in fact, the military isn't the enemy."

Another action genre cliche is danger from space. But have we, as Contact suggests, outgrown the idea in film that space is dangerous?

Jackson grins.

"There is the theory, you know, that there are only nine stories in the world. I don't think Hollywood outgrows its cliches, and we do serve that market. But the question of what's in outer space really addresses the most fundamental questions we have about ourselves, and where the universe came from. I don't think we ever outgrow those. The more we go into space and look back, the more rare, exciting and wonderful life here on earth should seem.

One of the wonderful things about real science fiction is the 'what if . . .' scenario.

"I very crassly wrote up a mandate: create a futuristic conflict between two people, a humanity-in-the-breach story which can optimize the use of sets we were making for other films. The writers made a synopsis about scientists, a man and woman battling to control something vital, a child genetically mutated to survive a disease that is wiping out humanity. That was the market-driven premise— biological warfare has created a virus that adapts faster than the immune system can create defenses for it.

The first draft was based on real science though, the "Red Queen theory," which says that sexual mixing of genes allows the immune system to stay ahead of the viruses that attack the body. So on the one hand, we're looking at sex as something that creates genetic variability as a life issue.

At the other extreme, we're looking at a very emotional and personal relationship [between Wincott's Dr. Denniel and his wife Lt. Pontaine].

Those two ends are tied to what this story! is about. Dan [D'or] and I vetted two or three drafts over marketing issues and such and had it accepted by distributors. Then Lewis [Baumander], whom we had engaged to direct it, began putting his own stamp on it. The script probably went through about 12 drafts altogether."

Baumander, despite his success as a stage director had never directed a feature film before Future Fear. Is this not a serious risk?

"I believe in putting creative opposites together to get the most interesting results," Jackson explains. "With risk-oriented, low budget films you sometimes use first-time directors. Bringing in someone from the outside, giving him an experienced team, and imposing the science fiction parameters the market demands will normally give you a more interesting result."

Back downstairs in the dimly lit studio, cast and crew work away at a thousand and one tasks. The deal-making done, the complex planning and preparation complete, slowly, patiently, frame by frame, another feature film is created.

Upstairs, at his crowded desk, Philip Jackson picks up the telephone, already working on the next deal.

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Cutting Edge

Highlander's real swordmaster challenged by series

By
GREGG CHAMBERLAIN

Swordmaster Braun McAsh is constantly challenged by the variety of weapons and fighting styles present on Highlander: The Series.

blades, sparks striking off the razor-keen edges as Immortals battle to the death in ritual combat. For in the end, there can be only One.

That sums up Highlander: The Series. At least from the point of view of someone sitting at home in front of the television.

Off camera, it's another matter. Especially if you're Braun McAsh, the series' swordmaster, and the guy who has to equip and prepare some of the actors for their debut as Duncan MacLeod's latest immortal adversary.

Most actors who get a chance as a guest-starring role on the series have one thing in common — They couldn't use a sword if their life depended on it.

Sword fighting availabilty is not something that is generally high on the needed-skills list in the acting profession.

"In a lot of cases, I have to train them from scratch," McAsh said.

He is the man to do the job since he took over from Bob Anderson, the series' original swordmaster. Anderson left after the second season.

McAsh's resume includes five years of competitive fencing at the University of Windsor (1972-76), plus training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, England, where he continued his fencing activities while furthering his instruction in theatre fighting techniques. After university, McAsh spent four seasons working on his theatre fighting craft with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ont. He was also lucky enough to get personal instruction in the art of theatre swordplay from Paddy Crean.

"One of the grand old men," McAsh said of his mentor.

In his younger days, Crean (as did Anderson) doubled for Errol Flynn during the actor's famous swashbuckling roles.

During the shooting of Highlander's fifth season, McAsh managed to have a somewhat easier time than in previous years. A number of the actors who came on the set had some training in swordplay, which meant that McAsh could concentrate on the choreography for the fight scenes between McLeod and an Immortal.

It is an exercise that could try even an Immortal's patience.

One thing McAsh does not do is shortchange the viewer by keeping the movements in a duel simple, even if one of the actors involved is a real tyro where swordsmanship is concerned.

"Oh no, the moves can be very complex," McAsh noted, adding that the actors must always try to come up to the expectations of their characters.

"The fight has got to reflect the script. If a character has been described as an absolute demon with a sword, I've got to make the actor seem a demon with a sword."

McAsh's work begins before Adrian Paul or any of the series' actors even see a script for the season's shooting run.

"I always get the script one episode ahead. That's essential."

With next week's script in hand McAsh then has enough time to read it over and determine what weapons will be needed for which actors during which scenes. Some weapons he may need to order or have them crafted to order. It all depends on how McAsh sees the personality and/or background of the Immortal character that he is arming.

If he has to order a custom-made sword, McAsh first sketches out the design then calls up a Vancouver weaponsmith to craft it. The final product is made out of aluminum which makes for a lightweight weapon

that allows greater ease of control — which is especially important for actors without much experience in swinging swords.

"If you're not a swordsman, the wrist can get pretty tired."

Some of the factors which help McAsh determine what type of weapon to provide includes the character's age, culture and how their experiences may have influenced their choice in weapons.

"Duncan MacLeod is a Scotsman, born in the highlands, and he is a good example of cross-culture weapons," McAsh observed.

During the present-day period of the series, MacLeod favors a Japanese katana and an oriental style of swordplay. But he is just as much at home dueling with a rapier and a dagger or thrusting away at an opponent with an Apache war lance.

While MacLeod may have originally learned the hack-and-slash fighting style of the highlander's two-handed claymore, his immortality has given him the opportunity to encounter a wide variety of weapons and fighting styles and to learn from these experiences. During the present-day period of the series, MacLeod favors a Japanese katana and an oriental style of swordplay. But he is just as much at home dueling with a rapier and a dagger or thrusting away at an opponent with an Apache war lance.

"If the culture dictates the weapon, I try to stick with it as much as possible," McAsh said.

If he is not restricted by cultural considerations for an Immortal character, then he determines what type of weapon and what style of fighting would seem to best suit the actor when the actual battle scene takes place. There are other factors which McAsh has to consider also.

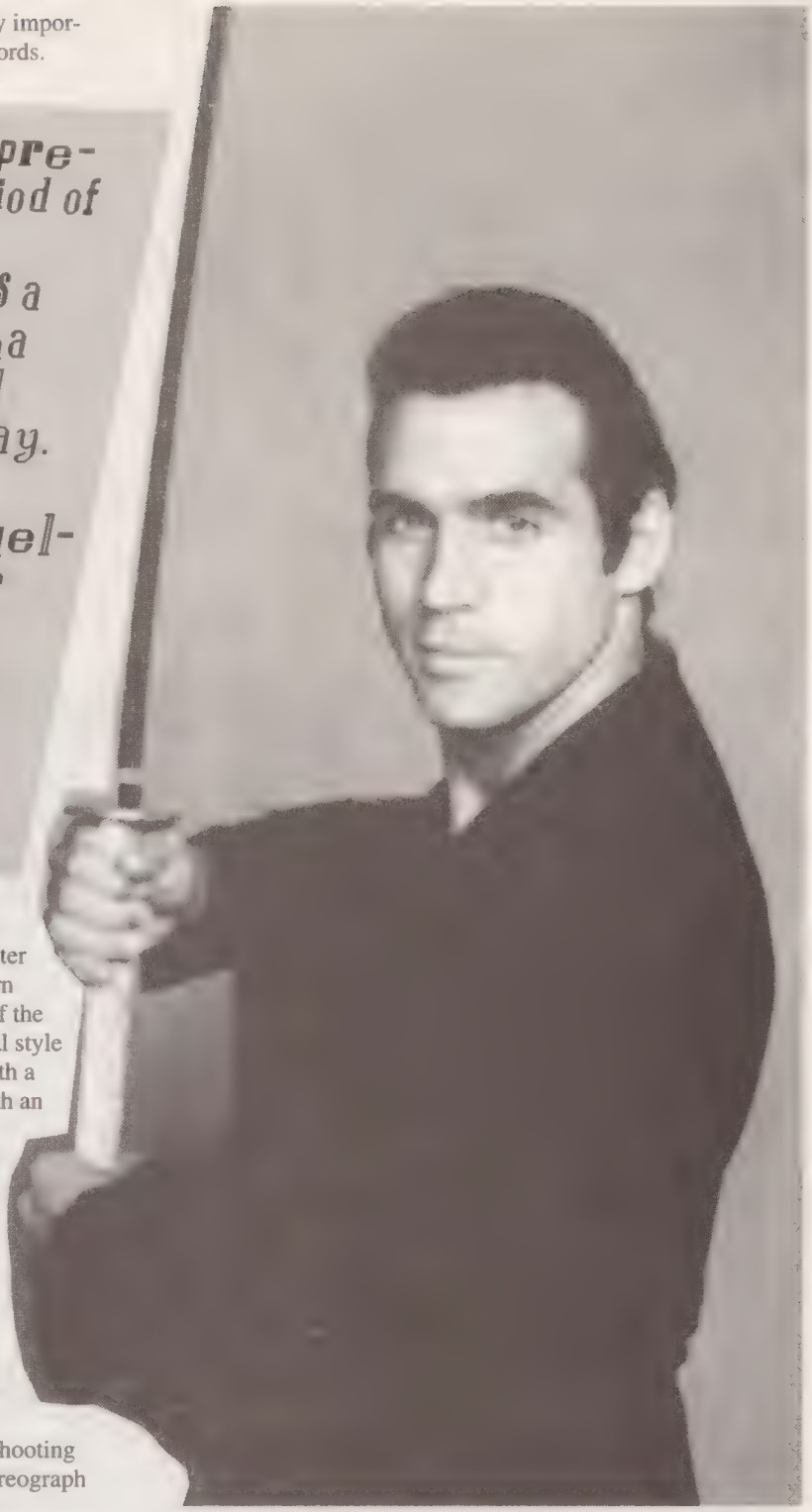
"There are sword designs that work better on camera than others.

Highlander: The Series averages a fight a day when shooting begins on an episode. Sometimes McAsh has had to choreograph as many as five sword fights for a single episode.

"I try to keep the choreography as historically accurate as possible."

McAsh relies not only on his years of training and study, but also on an incredible amount of research on other styles of combat. He has toured Europe and pored over archival documents, reading the actual training manuals which outline methods for dealing with particular attacks or defences involving certain types of weapons or kinds of armor.

He's also experimented with the weapons, armor and fighting styles to see how they measure up. After all, it's a matter of taking all that research and adapting it to the demands of the camera.



"Then we're taking the actual movements, slowing them down, broadening them out making them more theatrical."

He stresses that there is a world of difference between a staged fight for the cameras and a real fight with swords.

As an added precaution, participants in a theatrical fight must never touch their opponents even though the tip of the swords or edge of the blade may be blunt.

"Theatre fighting is much, much different from an actual fight," McAsh said. "The blow must NEVER be allowed to land. The main thing with sword choreography is complete control."

There are a number of points that McAsh must consider when

choreographing a fight. One is the speed factor of a particular weapon, the other is the terrain for the scene.

Sword fights are not restricted to duelling halls. They can break out in narrow back alleys, on busy city streets, inside the rotting confines of an abandoned warehouse, in the wide spaces of a meadow or along a quiet lakeshore.

McAsh always tries to make the best and realistic use of the existing terrain in planning possible moves for actors during unarmed combat sequences or when they're wildly swinging swords about and perhaps striking sparks off of rocks or lamp posts.

In some instances, short rehearsal times keep the actors from learning their moves before baring their blades.

"I've had some sword fights take place after only two hours of rehearsal."

With so many seasons in the can already, McAsh is faced with the challenge of trying to find something new when it's time for the Immortals to get down and dirty for a Quickening duel.

"The variation is what keeps me going with finding fresh things, new things," he said.

One of the aspects of the show that helps McAsh continue on is the opportunity to present different cultures and periods of time against each other.

The concept of immortality also presents a challenge for the swordmaster. Especially when it involves a character like Methos, the oldest Immortal at about 5,000 years old.

There's a definite thrill to considering all the fighting techniques that an individuals like Methos has learned during the millennia. Otherwise, McAsh said, being the Highlander's swordmaster wouldn't be as much fun if all he did was choreograph the same fighting style over and over.

"That would get a little bit boring."

Something to 'Quicken' the pulse

Darren Marcoux, Highlander's special effects co-ordinator, says it's one if the best jobs he's ever had.

"It's a lot of fun," he said.

Marcoux's company, Real Time Productions Inc., has provided special effects expertise on a wide variety of projects including M.A.N.T.I.S, The Sentinel and Jumanji.

"Like any series, we're on a pretty tight schedule," Marcoux said.

He usually gets time to read the script for the next episode just as shooting begins for the current episode he's working on. A lot of times, changes in scripts or locations require him to either rethink or scrap plans for an effect. After many years in the business, though, he's long since learned to avoid worrying about things like that.

"It's surprisingly demanding," Marcoux commented, although he noted there is a pretty low stress level on the project.

The main reason for that, he said, is the fact that the guiding principle for the series is to downplay the use of special effects.

"Instead of a whole lot of little things, we put our money into a few big ones that are quite noticeable."

Most of the effects involve pyrotechnics of one sort or another, with very little in the way of mechanical special effects.

Other than the occasional exploding car or some other bit of flash and fire, the most frequent and noticeable special effect are the computer-generated lightning bolts that are part of the Quickening scenes.

Marcoux doesn't have anything to do with these effects — they're dubbed in during post production — but he does plan his own tricks around the CGI lightning.

"We're trying to work around a theme of an electrical storm."

Quickening scenes have taken place near amusement park rides, in lakes inside parking garages and old buildings. Usually what Marcoux does is examine the surroundings where the Quickening will take place, see what outstanding terrain features exist that he might be able to work into the overall appearance of the Quickening and then decide what other items he might want to bring in to enhance the effect.

"I design very much on the environment."

If a Quickening scene takes place in a more wide-open area, then the bulk of the effects comes from CGI. Marcoux's part may involve bringing in wind machines and making a lot of smoke to help the computer-generated clouds and lightning bolts create an eerie atmosphere.

At times, the script may require the camera to go overhead and shoot down toward star Adrian Paul to show some kind of symbol, related to the Immortal that MacLeod has just beheaded, that may flash around the character for a moment during the Quickening.

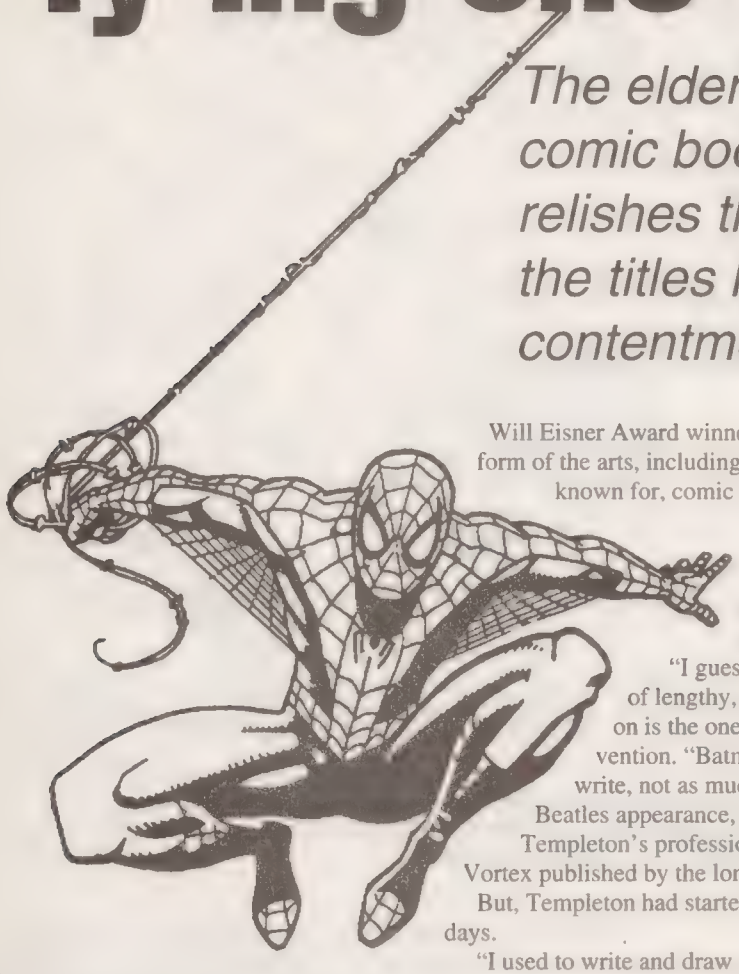
In such cases, Marcoux has taken some pyro fusing and twisted it around a small steel rod template of the symbol and concealed the entire works in the grass or beneath a thin covering of earth after first attaching a quick-match fuse with a long-burn contact for ignition.

"It stays burning and you get that flashback effect on a symbol."

— Gregg Chamberlain

'Ty'ing one on

The elder statesman of Canadian comic book artists, Ty Templeton, relishes the popularity of some of the titles he has worked on and his contentment with his career choice



By
JAMES ARMSTRONG

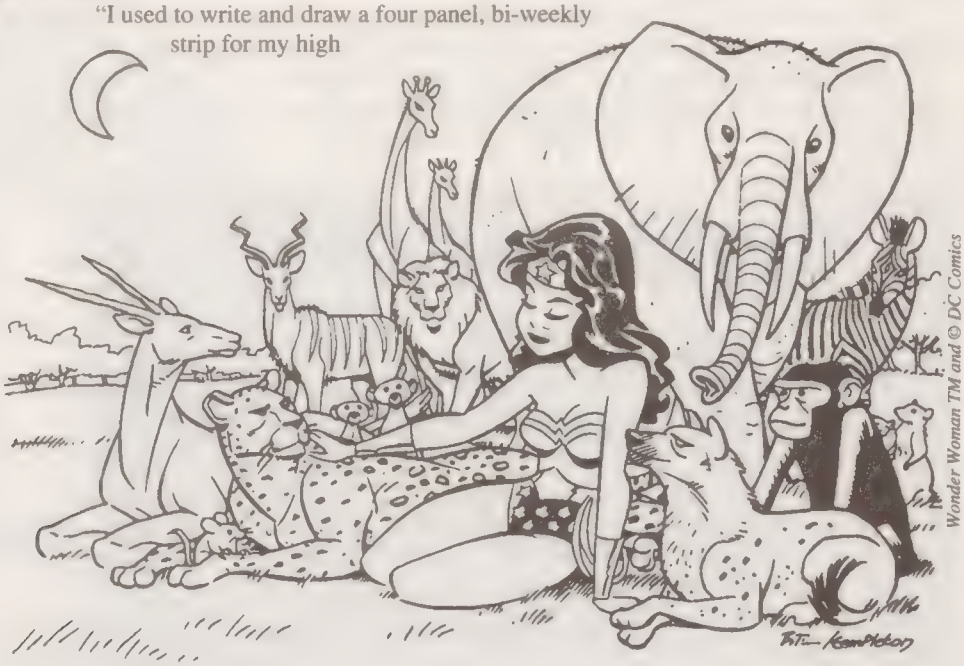
Will Eisner Award winner, Ty Templeton, has dabbled in almost every form of the arts, including acting, music, writing, and what he is best known for, comic art.

The Ontario College of Arts graduate and Toronto native, is considered by his peers as the veteran of the Canadian comic book scene due to his vast and high-profile work that spans over an almost 25-year career.

"I guess my list of comic book credits is getting kind of lengthy, but the book that I've been most happy to work on is the one I'm on now." Templeton said at a recent convention. "Batman and Robin Adventures, is a lot of fun to write, not as much fun to draw, though, I just got to draw in a Beatles appearance, which is pretty cool."

Templeton's professional comic book credits start with an issue of Vortex published by the long-dead Canadian publisher of the same name. But, Templeton had started his comic book work back in his high school days.

"I used to write and draw a four panel, bi-weekly strip for my high



Spiderman TM and ©Marvel Comics Group

Wonder Woman TM and © DC Comics

school newspaper. After art college, Vortex was already up and running right here in Toronto, so I sent in some samples. In the few years they were in operation, I worked on several different projects including, Vortex, Mister X, and Stig'g Inferno, which I also got to write."

> *Batman and Robin Adventures, is a lot of fun to write, not as much fun to draw.*

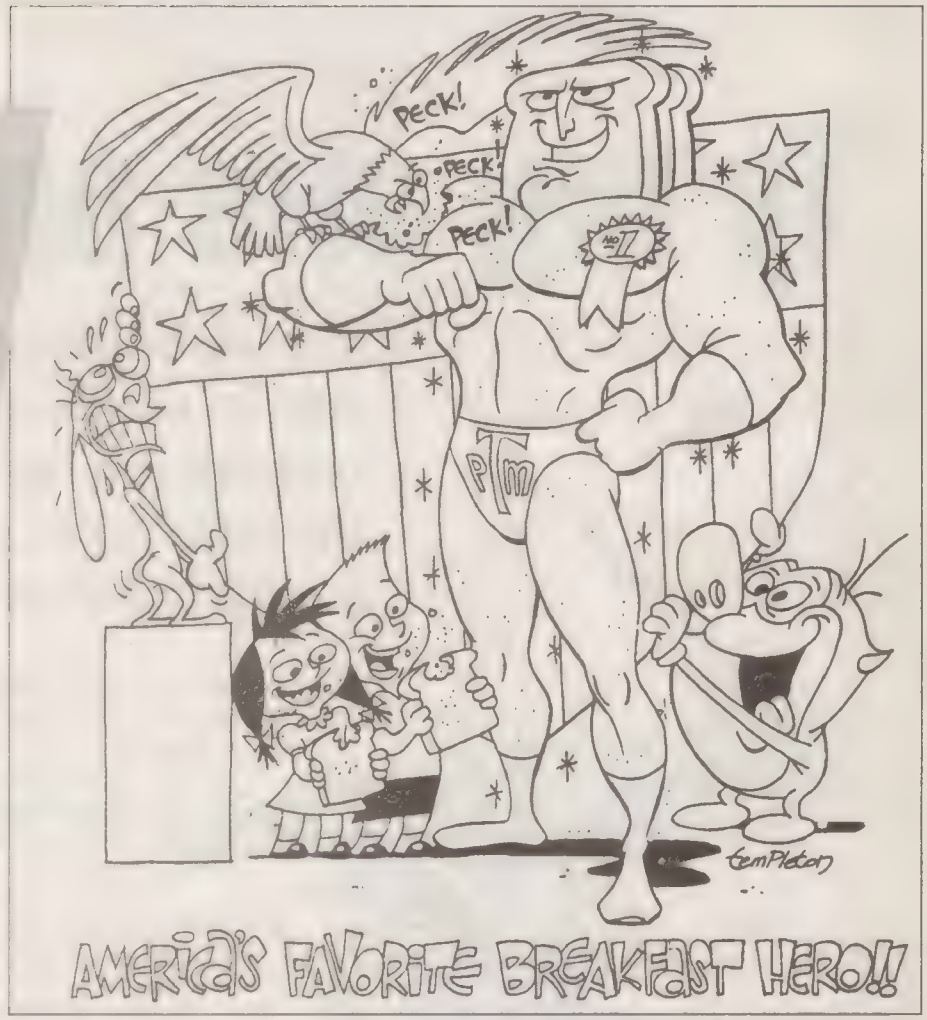
Due to Templeton's talent and experience, he had no trouble making connections with the major companies such as DC and Marvel.

"I've never really had much trouble finding work in the industry. I've worked for all the larger publishers. For Marvel I did things like Mad Dog, and the Ren & Stimpy Special, but I'm happy I'm working for DC right now."

Incidentally, Templeton's work on the Ren & Stimpy Special did not come about in the usual manner.

Templeton had seen the early episodes of the animated series on television, and enjoyed the show so much, that he put in a call to the producer, at Nickelodeon and asked to work on the comic book version. But, artists had already started work on the regular series, so Templeton had to settle for a special Powdered Toast Man issue

"I just basically called them up, and said, 'Hi! I'm Ty Templeton, a world famous comic book artist.' and they got me the job."



Characters TM and © Nickelodeon Productions

Even though Templeton couldn't get a job drawing Ren and Stimpy — a favorite cartoon of his — he was able to draw Powdered Toast Man as part of Marvel Comic's Ren & Stimpy Special.

Some people have even noticed that much of Templeton's recent comic book work is directly related to television.

"You remember that show, Bob, with Bob Newhart, well Mad Dog is the character that Bob was supposed to be drawing on the show. I did the mini-series for Marvel. Ren and Stimpy, that was a television show first. Batman is an obvious one, and Image asked me to do their version of Wildcats Adventures, which is also on T.V. So. Yeah. I guess there's some sort of pattern."

When Templeton got the call concerning his 1995 Will Eisner Award last year, he didn't take it very seriously.

"I get this call at my house, and the guy on the other end says he's Will Eisner, and that I've won this award for

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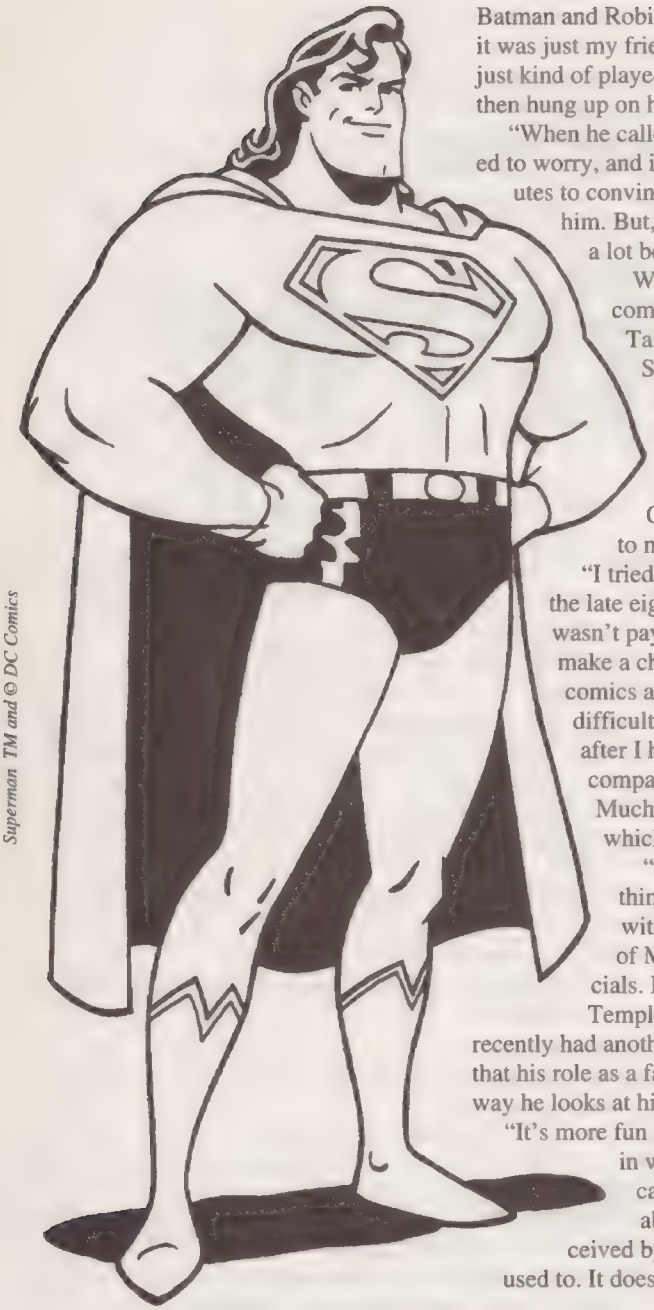

Superman TM and © DC Comics

Batman and Robin Adventures. I thought it was just my friends joking around, so I just kind of played along for a while, and then hung up on him.

"When he called me right back, I started to worry, and it took Will about 10 minutes to convince me that it was really him. But, I'm sure that's happened a lot before.'

While working for DC comics on titles such as; Tailgunner Jo, Legion of Super-Heroes, Adventures of Superman, Justice League of America, Elongated Man, Action Comics and Secret Origins, Templeton had to make a career choice.

"I tried acting for three years in the late eighties. But, sometimes it wasn't paying the bills, so I had to make a choice between working in comics and acting. It was very difficult too, because shortly after I had quit acting, a touring company offered me a role in Much Ado About Nothing which I really wanted to do.

"But, I got in a few things, like Sea of Love, with Al Pacino, and a bunch of McDonald's commercials. I liked doing it.'

Templeton and his wife have recently had another child, and he believes that his role as a father has changed the way he looks at his work.

"It's more fun now that my kids share in what I enjoy, and I do catch myself thinking about the content, as perceived by kids, more often than I used to. It doesn't bother me or anything, it's just you don't really think about things the same after you have children."

Success has not gone to Templeton's head though, even after hearing that the first issue of Batman Adventures has sold more than 250,000 copies, and after his temporary departure, sales dropped.

"That stuffs always nice to hear, but you can't rely on it, because next month they may be telling you that your title is on the chopping block. This business has huge ups and downs, and it's impossible to tell what's going to happen next."

Characters TM and © Harris Publications

Superheros and strange animals aren't the only characters on Templeton's palette. He's been known to draw a vampire or two.

Batman and Robin aren't the only DC heroes to come from the point of Templeton's pencil. He also has an affinity for the Man of Steel.

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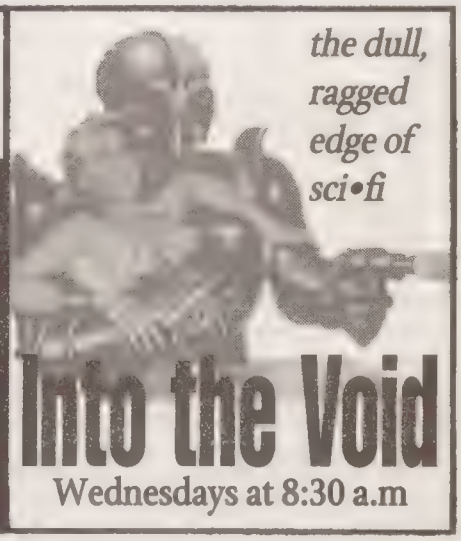

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But time passed, and no matter what Simon tried, Julia remained sullen . . . unwilling to talk, to listen, to even look at him.

So he tried harder.

They went to Hawaii and watched the fire-fountains of Kiluaea. She ignored him. He took her to Stonehenge, at Midsummer. She turned her back on the rising sun. He gave her Victoria Falls in the moonlight. She stared at the ground. He offered her all the virtual wonders he could find — Giza, the Rhine Gorge, Mount Fuji, the Giant's Causeway. He even made gifts of digital fantasies that had never existed — fairy castles of glass and silver, ethereal cloudscapes, crystalline realms of glowing coral and singing, rainbow fish.

Each time, she told him the same thing . . . enough, no more, just stop it, please, just end it . . .

And there were more pragmatic problems. Julia's database kept expanding in a steady, linear fashion, suggesting that her Turing "mind" was faithfully turning each instant of runtime into durable memory. The system manager had already granted him one workspace expansion, but even with all the hacker tricks he knew, there was only so long he could keep gobbling up the gigabytes without attracting attention. And that he definitely didn't want to do, because old man Harper had ordered his daughter's scans wiped after her death . . .

But he wasn't ready to give up yet. He'd try once more. Something very special . . .

"Julia?"

She looked up, then around.

They sat in a vast hall, lit only by candles and a distant hearth. Between them sprawled a massive cabriole table of rosewood, spread with steaming silver platters and glittering crystal bowls. Amber champagne filled tulip pewter, its delicate bubbling just audible over Albinoni's "Adagio in G." Around them, gilded cherubs glittered around the high cornices, bright counterpoints to the soft rococo murals of the ceiling vaults.

"It's the dining room from Versailles Palace," Simon said. "Where the French kings used to live. I put a lot of work into it, and . . . well, I hope you like it."

She looked at the table and said nothing.

"Julia, look. I'm really sorry about what's happened.

But . . . I'm trying so hard to be nice, and it doesn't seem to be working. Please, tell me what I can do for you. And please don't tell me to end everything."

She finally met his eyes. "Alright, fine. If you won't let me go, then you can let me see my father."

"What?"

"You heard me. Let me see my father. You can do that, right?"

"It's . . . not that simple."

"Yes, it is. If you can come here, so can he. Let me see him, Simon, and then we'll talk."

"No."

"But —"

"NO!"

Simon's word crashed through Albinoni's strings. He forced his voice back down. "No. We are going to spend some time together, just the two of us, getting to know one another." He picked up his champagne. "You know, so far it's all been talk about me. Tell me about yourself —"

The scrape of her chair on the marble cut him off.

"Damn it! Julia, come back here!" Simon threw his glass aside and charged around the table. Grabbing Julia's shoulder, he spun her around.

"I AM GETTING PRETTY GODDAMNED TIRED OF THIS!" he shouted, then again fought his voice back to a normal tone.

"The least you could do is be civil to me—"

"Let go of me!"

"Julia, you—"

The world flashed green and rang like a thunderclap. Simon staggered back, clutching his head. Julia dropped the champagne bottle and pulled free, putting a chair between them.

Another sheet of pain swept through him. He waited until it subsided, then adjusted the interface's sensory feed. His head instantly cleared.

"YOU ARE ONE UNGRATEFUL BITCH!"

"Really? Just what do I have to be grateful for, Simon?"

"For your life! You'd be nothing right now, if it wasn't for me!"

"You call this life? Flickering from one of your fantasies to another? Never knowing when it's all going to suddenly change? It's not real, Simon! None of it's real!"

"It's real enough —"

"NO! IT'S NOT! No matter how much you want to believe it, it's NOT! No matter how much you want to believe it, I WILL NEVER LOVE YOU!

Rage flashed through him, furnace-hot. He swept the chair aside, started to lunge . . . Stopped . . . Went up.

Dark inspiration came even as he tore off the headset. Julia just needed to see what her alternatives were.

Then she'd see how much she owed him . . .how much she depended on him. And she'd listen . . .

He worked the data-gloves.

The image had haunted him since he'd first stumbled on it, during one of many nights he'd spent roaming the net. Idly browsing through a library of old paintings, he'd only been half paying attention when it appeared — There.

Simon sat back. The caption beneath the image said, "A triptych, 'The Garden of Earthly Delights,' by Hieronymus Bosch, circa 1500.' There were three panels: "Paradise and Original Sin" on the left, "The Garden of Delights" in the middle, and on the right . . .

. . . on the right was "Hell."

"Julia," he said to the screen, "I don't want to do this to you."

He stared at Bosch's nightmare. (. . . I will never love you . . .)

"But it's your fault," he whispered. "You're making me do it."

(She's just like all the rest.)

He went to work.

It didn't take long. The computer had a pattern-and-context recognition program routinely used to generate new constructs from digital images. He started it scrutinizing Bosch's dark vision, selecting individual elements, identifying them, then placing them in the context of their surroundings. Cross-references scrolled across a split-screen, as the system scoured database after database for useful references:

. . . THE BOOK OF JOB . . . REVELATIONS . . . THE LEMATAGON . . . MALLEUS MALEFICARIUM . . . SOLOMON'S KEY . . . BOOK OF MARK . . . WITCHCRAFT . . . SALEM TRIALS...BLACK MASS...SCULPTURES OF GISELBERTUS . . . FAUSTUS . . . DIVINE COMEDY . . . PARADISE LOST . . . BLACK EASTER . . . THE DAY AFTER JUDGEMENT . . . ROSEMARY'S BABY . . . THE EXORCIST . . .

And on and on, until:

CONTEXT SEARCH COMPLETE

NOW BUILDING CONSTRUCT

CONSTRUCT COMPLETE AND READY FOR USE

Simon raised the data gloves, then hesitated and looked again at Bosch's vision of Hell.

"Oh, Julia...."

(. . . I WILL NEVER LOVE YOU . . . !)

He ran the program.

"Hello, Simon."
"What's going on?"
"Why, what could be going on, Simon? I'm just software, after all."

It was worse than the earlier problem with the data streams. She crashed again and again, her files unable to merge with any construct. He couldn't correct it, and had finally almost resorted to loading a backup copy and starting all over, when he hit upon the solution. It was just a matter of nesting versions of her, giving her earlier self access to the later one. Memories of memories, as it were. It ate up all of his remaining workspace allocation, and quite a bit more, but he didn't care.

She stood watching him from across the forest construct where they'd first met. She looked unchanged, but shadows clouded the blue of her eyes. He found he couldn't face them, and stared at the ground instead.

"Julia, please. I don't want to hurt you."

Silence.

"You're making me do it, you know. You're making me hurt you."

Nothing.

He forced himself to look at her. "All you have to do is give me a chance . . . just get to know me. I won't hurt you anymore, I promise."

This time she said something, but it was lost in the rustle of leaves.

"What?"

"I said that I hate you."

Simon stiffened.

"Julia, don't," he whispered.

"I hate you, Simon. Now, and always."

"NO! You will LOVE ME! You are nothing but software, NOTHING BUT GODDAMNED SOFTWARE, so even if I have to find a way to PROGRAM you to do it, you WILL LOVE ME!"

He flung himself up . . .

. . . to find an error message on the monitor: ERROR: E14568 FILE SERIES 'JULIA.*' NOT CLOSED

He shook his head, scowling as the headset slipped over his eyes. He pulled it off and looked at the screen again.

Files not closed . . . ?

He picked up the data gloves, but had only put one on when the error cleared.

Simon hesitated, then put the headset back on, reactivated the construct and went back down . . .

. . . to find Julia standing, in the forest glade, as before. He glanced around. Everything looked the same. Except for her eyes. There was something else in them now, besides shadows —

"Hello, Simon."

"What's going on?"

"Why, what could be going on, Simon? I'm just software, after all."

The something was in her voice, too.

"Just software," she went on. "You said it. And I'm glad, because it made me realize the mistake we've both been making. We've both been thinking of me as human. But I'm not. I'm software. So, I actually have a few more alternatives than the ones you've offered."

Simon finally recognized that something. It was purpose, clear and cold.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"This."

The forest melted into Bosch's Hellscape.

Simon screamed, but Julia's voice thundered it into nothing.

"Oh, it took me a while to figure it out—but then, I've had ages to think about it. A few whole seconds, thanks to you." She smiled a smile that made Simon scream again. "AFTER ALL, WE'RE NOT IN REALTIME ANYMORE . . ." Simon screamed and kept screaming — "SO, SIMON, WELCOME TO MY NIGHTMARE . . . "

Simon's agony soared up to an exquisite and bitter peak, then the world dissolved . . .

. . . and resolved back into a soft grey hum. Simon blinked, looked around. He was in his office, sprawled sideways across the contour chair.

What just happened...?

Oh—

With a cry he tore the headset off and threw it away. It struck the monitor, where something was flashing: **BIO-MONITOR INTERVENTION** USER VITAL SIGNS IN EXCESS OF ACCEPTED PARAMETERS HAVE CAUSED SYSTEM SHUTDOWN THE SYSADMIN HAS BEEN NOTIFIED

There was more, but Simon ignored it and lowered his forehead against the cool glass of the screen . . .

He sat back up. He had to get rid of her. Of her, the Bosch-esque construct, the backup copies—everything.

Delete it, purge it all from the system. He snatched up the data gloves . . .

A stray thought—was this murder?

He dismissed it, deleting all of the involved files and overwriting them with random noise. Then he tidied up the office, switched the system to power-save and closed the door. Time to get out of this room and away from this computer . . . into fresh air that really was fresh, and not just portrayed that way.

The computerized voice in the elevator said, "Floor, please?"

"Parking two."

"Parking two selected," it replied, and the doors slid closed. "Oh, by the way, Simon," the elevator went on in Julia's voice, "I hope you don't mind if we speed things up a bit . . ."

Simon shrieked as the world plunged out from under him and the elevator fell and fell —

— then slowed, lowering him gently to the floor.

"Oh, Simon," Julia's voice said, as the elevator came to a stop. "You didn't think it would be that easy, did you?" She laughed. "You were right . . . I do owe you. I owe you a great deal. And it's going to be so easy to pay you back, because it's simple getting around when you're just software. After all, there are computers everywhere . . . "

"NOOOOO . . ." he screamed, and punched the "OPEN DOORS" button over and over. They finally did, spilling him out of the elevator and onto cold, polished marble. Then they whispered shut, cutting off her laughter. Simon pounded through the lobby, ignoring the gaping faces of the cleaners, into the humid Winnipeg night.

He sat back up. He had to get rid of her. Of her, the Bosch-esque construct, the backup copies—everything.

Delete it, purge it all from the system. He snatched up the data gloves . . .

A stray thought—was this murder?

He stopped, wiping sweat from his face. He thought about his car, sitting in the underground garage. As usual, he'd left its computer on, downloading interesting news items, traffic reports, music . . .

And what else?

He whimpered. Where could he go . . . ?

A taxi. He'd take a taxi home. There, he could think. Right. Taking a deep breath, he walked up to the corner. There was a stand just down the street.

The "WALK" sign flashed, brilliant green.

Without thinking, he started to step out —

And froze.

The "WALK" sign was controlled by a computer.

He whimpered again.

. . . there are computers everywhere . . .

"WALK" . . . "WALK" . . . "WALK" . .

Simon looked both ways, then hurried across the street.

☆

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No telephone calls please

It takes a special key to unlock some doors

Raven Rattle

Story by
Catherine Donahue
Art by
John Platt

As she prepared her Eagle for the approach, Nuu-Chah, was offended by the archaic airport in the middle of the long, low building. Architecture to no purpose, except to echo old glory days of airports past. A tower and flat concrete landscape instead of trees and rolling hills. This was where Jon lived, where he fled to, thirty years before. Jon had run home to a world that found the past a benediction and the present a horror.

Enough of that, she thought, concentrating now on the approach to the quaint 'runways' of this port. She could land on the roof of the longhouse, like she was used to on Kagwantan, her home. She could land softly, making no sound, and not intruding on the gulls on the beach or the bears in the nearby forest. But here they wanted fanfare, an approach, a fly-by of the tower, to satisfy Homeworld ego. The inhabitants of Earth loved to show off their 'Trade with Other Worlds,' a trade limited to goods. Nuu-Chah knew that they felt that ideas were the property of Earth alone and thus outlawed importations that was not derived from Earth science.

Nuu-Chah's Eagle was a tiny craft, and looked lilliputian in the huge Private Jet Hangar. The hangar was well-guarded though, she thought and wondered about why there was so much crime on this most imperial of worlds. She walked away from her Eagle wishing that they allowed the use of such 'alien' technology here. Her Eagle could have taken her directly to the University, directly to Jon, but the authorities would not allow it. She would not be as fearful herself if her Eagle was there. But it could not be. She had to see Jon at the appointed hour. It was very important. The Eagle, much as she loved it, would have no more meaning for her after this meeting.

She was forced to chance public transit, a quiet controlled underground with guards at every door. A child laughed at her long black hair and asked her if she was a witch. She smiled and said, no, Kagwantan Indian. The child ran away, frightened of her. She sighed. There was so much misunderstanding.

When the train stopped, the uniformed guard looked at her and asked where she was going.

"Alumna University."

"This is your stop, then Madame."

He pulled open the door for her. She wondered briefly why he had asked her then, if he knew already, and not at the twenty-odd stops before. Why now and why here? But she got off anyway, rolling with the flow of old Earth control, that she felt wash about her, realising that her every move was being watched. There was no other way to do it, it had to be done. Her son, Loon-Chil would forgive her, she hoped.

She was the one who had been given the dream, and she felt the fullness of its truth when she saw how grey the people of earth were. Over the years, officialdom and computerised rules had taken the place of dreams and wild adventures. The Earth that had explored the galaxy with wild cowboy dreams of open space had been replaced in this century by a regime of bureaucrats. It was time to take wisdom from the Earth and give it to the Kagwantan who so desired it.

She saw the university crest on the short grass ahead of her, with swords and words on it. The motto was "Truth Forever." As Nuu-Chah approached, she realised the crest was made of flowers. It was the exact crest and colouration that she recalled from her days as an Earth-Alumn University student on Kagwantan. Uncanny to see the crest created like this, of flowers bent and forced into proclaiming Alumna University more powerful than the forces of nature. It saddened her. In contrast, she recalled the brilliant reds, oranges and pinks of the bush flowers beside her own lodge, wild and glorious and now far away.

In the Department office, there was a woman in a blue uniform sitting at a desk who asked her to supply a reason for her visit to Jon.

"He was my teacher."

"Your name please."

She hesitated. What was the name that Nuu-Chah had used to register at the university, years before? It had been so many years. Before Jon's childhood friend Martus was Imperial Bureaucrat and Jon, with fore in his heart had returned to Earth to help Martus conquer.

So long ago. According to her people, Martus reigned with closed eyes. Imperial Edict now forbid "tourist" travel to "superstitous colonies," not like the old days when they partook of learning together as a great adventure.

"Your name, Madame." The woman was losing patience.

"Nuu-Chan you would say, Sand-Woman, I believe. " Yes, that was the translation, not that it meant anything here, nor would Jon recognise it. It was her last name, her adult name, conferred to her in memory of the days she stood on the sand determinedly watching the sky for the return of her red-headed lover. He never came again. All his promises had been so much salt water.

The woman looked up at her. "Your real name please. We can't let anyone in to see faculty unless they are security checked and you can't be an old student without a real name."

"I'm from Kagwantan. That is my real name."

"I can tell where you are from," the woman sniffed. "Your Kagwantan name will be appended onto the name the university used for you. What was that name?"

"The name he gave me was Janedoe."

The woman was satisfied," You can go in and see him now." She touched a pad on her desk to alert Jon and read a message there. "Apparently, he's been expecting you."

It was Nuu-Chah's turn to smile now. So they were spying on her.

He never came back. But he sent her messages asking her to join his revolution. He never thought she'd last on Kagwantan once she'd fallen in love with him. She was too "smart" for that, she needed "civilisation." Oh, she thought, how much you knew and how little.

The woman wasn't finished. "He's a Knight now. You call him 'Sir Jonathan'. And do not sit on the floor. It is not etiquette here."

Saving her "great man" from a breach of etiquette. My, thought Nuu-Chah with a smile, that is devotion.

Nuu-Chah walked into a dark mahogany panelled room. There were green velvet curtains and it smelled of old paper. He was there, behind a large black lacquered desk. He was small now, disappearing with age into his armchair.

He got up to meet her with a smile. "My Janedoe."

"Sir Jonathan," she smiled back at him. "I hear you are a Knight."

"I am pleased to see you."

"And I you." They embraced briefly. His bones were like a bird's and he smelled old. She wondered if she had the strength to talk to him, to tell him. She wondered if he could make her feel happy again, if he had ever made her happy. Was it a malicious destiny that had placed him on Kagwantan so long ago when she was ripe to fall in love?

"Please take a seat, Jane and let us have some tea." He motioned her over to a small sitting area consisting of a lacquered table and two low cushioned chairs. Tea was arranged on the table with care. There were coloured cakes that looked as though they were made of paper.

He must have known the minute I touched one, she realised. A spy network is in place. This high tea was prepared for us, no doubt with secret watchers in the walls. Why do they fear an old woman?

"Why have you come now?" He smiled and looked wan at the same time. "I have grown old waiting for you." He gestured at his hair, now completely white, once red gold. "You look the same, black hair, Kagwantan Indian clothes. But I know that the fountain of youth, that the shaman promised to you colonists never existed. I know that." He was almost shrill.

"I partake of Kagwantan technologies, as is my heritage." She bowed and took a seat. "They slow the aging process, but they do not give us immortality in these bodies. Would a fly want to always be a fly and never know the life of a bird?"

"This is nonsense."

"We would trade Kagwantan technologies with you, if your kind would accept them."

"You know very well there is no such thing as Kagwantan Technology. Your planet was seeded with humans by Earth, and you are merely using leftover bits and pieces of a civilisation that died before our ships landed. You belong to Earth and no one knows how that technology affects humans, what we would become if we did as you and turned savage to please some crazy shaman technology. You people are experimental rats."

She smiled, grimly. Time does not destroy enmity, not this time, nor this enmity.

"We are Kagwantan now." She poured the tea ceremoniously, some things of Earth she had not forgotten. "I am known as Nuu-Chah, now."

He put three teaspoonfuls of sugar in his cup. She put lemon in her tea. The taste of tea brought back the days when she had been his student and lover on Kagwantan, the days when there was a chance for things to change, a long time ago.

"Have you many students now?"

"No, no one is interested in Lost Colony Psychology anymore. They all believe that the Kagwantan lie and Arnaseans cheat and that alien technologies destroy the fundamental drives of the human being. They believe that the Empire needs good accountants."

He laughed at his small joke until he coughed and hacked and looked very frail.

"But I still do my work. I teach Imperial agents now, a few every year. They don't allow tourists of course, but agents go everywhere."

When she looked at Jon like a lover, he seemed to be bleeding from his soul, a soul much larger than the man in it would admit to. Then he was defensive, angry, talking about his school, his University, his honours. Did she know he was the first man to be Knighted by the Realm since the 20th Century? He had no students of interest, but did that really matter? So his life had turned from the pursuit of knowledge to the pursuit of status.

The dream of a coherent Alliance of Worlds still stands in his mind, she thought, even though they cut themselves off from all new knowledge and treat us more like enemies than allies. He was in truth no older than she and it saddened her to see him like this, old, forgotten, broken.

"It was your choice, my friend." She spoke softly. "You did not return. I could not leave."

"So, Kagwantan," his pride was hurt now. Old wounds pouring out bile and blood in his mind: "Why have you come? To tell me you miss me? To join us here, on Old Earth? You see I am not the Prime Minister after all. Martus took it all. He is the Imperial Bureaucrat and I do him homage, but there was no new Silver Age of Knowledge, you know that. Why have you come here? To taunt an old man with your alien soul stealing youth?"

"Your civilisation is dead. It is a horror and an abomination to me." She spoke quietly. She felt embarrassed then, to be bold with him, to insult his world and his life, but the words surfaced too fast and she could not have stopped herself from saying them. "I told you fifty years ago that dictators bring no one knowledge."

"So why visit me, then? To show me your young face, bought with servitude to an ancient alien technology you don't have a hope of understanding?" He paused for breath.

"Unlike you, Nuu-Chah witch, I am an old man now, a very old man and I have limited patience!" He brought his fist down on the tea table. A cup and saucer of ancient rose petal pattern clattered to the floor and broke into a thousand shards on the tile.

"No," she said. "I saw you in a dream. You joined me in the search for understanding. We came together in the Raven Rattle. The Kagwantan technology code was broken. It took many years to accomplish, but in this time all the worlds became kinder as well as richer."

He laughed. He laughed until he was sick almost, with the tears running down his cheeks. She sat stiffly, thinking he might have gone senile, that the dream came down too late, and it hurt her to see her mentor/lover withered and half-mad. Had she been crazy to reach out to him? Then Jon stopped laughing and looked at her.

"A dream! It has been so long, Nuu-Chah, since I have heard kagwantan logic. Your saw me in a dream and travelled lightyears to see me in person." He was genuinely touched though, she could see.

"Such a waste of time, to see an old man. I wonder what the Entry Agents made of you, they probably wrote 'pagan witch' on your passport file."

Nuu-Chah pulled out of her pocket a Rattle. It was a wooden carved Raven face with hooked beak and feathers attached to it. It had been painted black and red with parts of the wood left exposed. It hummed with the music of the forests. The room suddenly smelled of living cedar, damp and thickly green.

But please don't wave smelly wooden objects at me. At least, you could talk about your life, Nuu-Chah, or your children, not your damned cult." He was recovering himself, being the Teacher/Friend again. She was almost amused.

"My children are well," she began and talked for at least an hour of her children. They ignored the broken teacup on the floor, cleaning was for his "servants" to do, he said. He asked about Loon-Chil, her eldest son, the one with the red-coloured hair.

She said Loon-Chil was fine, and his children were fine. No, he did not have any trouble because he looked different from her other children, because he was Jon's son.

"I have a will," he said. "Martus has given me great estates here. I have no other heir. I have always acknowledged Loon-Chil, you know, much though it cost me politically."

"Yes," she said, "He has followed your successes here. He has only one wish, though, and that is not to be heir to estates on a world such as this."

"His wish? But I'm the old man here! I want him to obey my wishes, they could be my last wishes! Can't you see that?" He looked earnestly at her.

She held her heart together, linking their pasts and her dream, seeing the face of her son begging her not to make this doomed trip. She told him that she at least must try. That maybe now, after all these years on this cruel world, Jon would wish to go back to Kagwantan with her, in her way. She spoke to him then in her own language.

"I saw you in a dream, my Jon, my love. I felt you die. And I saw there was no one there to take your spirit to your kin on Kagwantan. You wandered this cold Earth for eternity. My wish is that you let me carry your spirit back to Kagwantan."

He looked at her carefully and spoke slowly. "It has always been very dangerous, for me to associate with you. Right now someone, probably a young man I trained is working on the English translation of your Kagwantan nonsense. 'Eternity' is a difficult concept. But you said 'you felt me die' and the ears in the walls will understand that this could be translated as a death threat."

She was disappointed. He wanted her to retract her words, to say this was just a superstitious way of visiting an old friend, the father of her son.

She was disappointed. He wanted her to retract her words, to say this was just a superstitious way of visiting an old friend, the father of her son. She did not move.

"So Nuu-Chah, tell them it was not a threat. *Tell me it was not a threat*! They will kill you, and I don't want that."

He didn't understand. She was surprised. Surely Jon, of all the people on Earth would know what she meant, but he didn't.

After a pause, he spoke quietly again: "Nuu-Chah you must tell me, have you come here to kill me?"

"How could you think that I could kill you, Jon, even after all these years of abandonment?" Tears formed in her eyes. He could not trust at all now, not even her.

He got up and spoke toward the walls.

"Security please ignore what this woman is saying. It is ritualistic speech, not to be taken literally." To her he smiled coldly.

"It wasn't enough, was it I gave you all I had. And you've never forgiven me." Suddenly his faced changed colour. It went pale and grey. He clutched his chest.

"Did you come to kill me after all?" He recognised dimly recalled heart attack symptoms as pain shot up his arm and through his chest. "I loved you." He was in great pain.

She got out the Rattle. She placed it on his head and spoke to him slowly.

"I did not kill you, my love. I knew of the time is all. Now concentrate on me, on Kagwantan, on Martus, on your son, on anything you can love or hate. It will impress the Rattle."

He looked up at her, wanting to believe, but not understanding.

"Call it what you will, but on Kagwantan we've found the transmigration device. We don't die anymore, we live on in non-human bodies and we become Totems." He looked at her with even more questions in his eyes and died.

Nuu-Chah held the Rattle as it warmed and became hot with his spirit. She recalled the days before her work began, when as Janedoe she showed her lover, a young Jon, the world of Kagwantan and bore his child. She tried not to think of the cantankerous old man he was — had been. She tried not to remember how much she loved her own human body and its familiar senses. She thought of her black hair and her lithe brown body and felt sad to leave them. She saw the faces of Loon-Chil and her other children at her own funeral feast, which they would have soon. She hoped the Rattle would reach her son as she had intended, for it was her only hope now for a new life, a kind of insect-to-bird transmigration. She prayed that, joined with Jon, their souls would become the family Totem.

The guards arrived in time to watch her take the Rattle from Jon's head and put it to her own forehead. Sir Jonathan was quite dead. The guards saw the Raven Rattle as a weapon. They looked at one another and nodded.

She had done her duty, She hoped they would do heres. Nuu-Chah raised her hands to her head and touched the Rattle Raven's beak. They would be together again, Nuu-Chah and her Jon, in Kagwantan. She hoped it was as predicted. She prayed it was enough, that her love would be enough. She didn't really want to be stuck forever with an angry old man. She wanted her young lover back and her body back. But even humans with Kagwantan knowledge cannot live forever. She saw that in her dream as well. This time was her time as well. She held the Rattle tightly to her forehead.

The guards raised their guns as they would at any terrorist and fired. She died quickly and quietly. The Rattle was red-hot when the guard picked it up.

☆1) Who created Babylon

SIMULAW

Legal maneuvers provide solid defence for liberty and pursuit of happiness . . .or does it?

Story by
Dennis Valdron

Two green cavemen were bonking each others heads with clubs on the Holo. Susan Flanagan opened one sleepy eye and groaned.

Manually she adjusted the tint until both cavemen were cartoon pink and their clubs a proper brown. She wondered how her lawsuit against the manufacturer was going. Then she groaned again and pulled a pillow over her head. It was too early!

On the Holo the cartoon cavemen continued their mayhem, as they chased each other, gouged eyes, and threw spears. Being cartoon neanderthals, they bore a vague resemblance to earlier animated cavemen. This too was the subject of a lawsuit. As they maimed each other the announcer's smooth masculine voice overrode the grunts and groans.

"Yes, it's a jungle out there, but you've come a long way from the apes, baby. Your life is too important for monkey business, don't be a victim of simian justice. Get SIMULAW the first and finest legal program, now with an advisor function.

Perfect defense, perfect offence, SIMULAW!"

On the holo the cave men continued to inflict senseless violence on each other. Normally, she would have just laid there with the pillow over her head blocking out the offending world.

She did that a lot these days.

But the adblurb had reminded her of the days assignment. She pulled herself out of bed and walked the half dozen steps across her one room apartment to her work/entertainment console. She pulled a cigarette out and almost lit it, but at the last second thought better of it. Instead, she screened her SIMULAW index. It took the console five minutes to scroll through the update of the thirty-two legal suits she was defending or prosecuting. She noted a new lawsuit against her with interest, but couldn't recall the incident that the factum set out.

Maybe it was a case of mistaken identity? Briefly, she set her program to compiling briefs for a counter claim focusing on Abuse of Process, Malicious Proceedings, and Defamation. She chewed her nails thoughtfully, an old smokers reflex, and then went into the General Proceedings database. The only tobacco related case that was going on was a class action against the State by a group of Nicotine Addicts alleging that the government had violated the Human Rights Codes by levying excessive tobacco taxes, thus singling smokers out for punishment.

It was safe then. Good. She lit the cigarette and closed her eyes, taking a long sensual drag. She luxuriated in the sheer joy of a good cigarette and finally began to feel human.

She thought about going for a walk later that day. Meteorology scans predicted a nice day. She ordered a legal projection and advisory. Her program accepted the command, then returned to its display of the Nicotine Addicts class action suit. The console displayed predicted chances of the actions resolution in success or settlement and the likely cash award. Tapping her keys she joined the class action.

It was time to go to work. She set her SIMULAW on automatic, with scan and recall functions in case something popped up that she should know about. Then she cleared her console and instituted word processing and accessories on the first screen, and called up her notes and research on the three subsidiaries.

She scrolled through her notes looking for a good lead.

This one seemed likely.

"The Colt .45 was history's first equalizer."

Was this accurate? She wondered. She put a check mark beside it. In the Wild West the man with a gun need submit to no other. The cowboy's egalitarian society was based on the premise that man could not be oppressed when the means of violence were universal." She flexed her fingers and spun the idea . . .

"But this equality, based on arms and courage, was a fiction. All men were not equal. Speed, recklessness, military and paramilitary organisations, even property, undermined the foundations of the Wild West myth."

"The gunslingers became heroes, because in a society based on the notions of freedom and equality through strength, they were more equal than their fellows and achieved transcendant freedom."

This was going nowhere, she thought. She saved the opening, dumped it into the notes file, and tried again.

"You're suing me!" he accused.

"The twentieth century Lawyer was the ultimate civilised mercenary. A 'hired gun' knowing no honour or loyalty past his own duty to clients, the lawyer walked into the courtroom the way ancient warriors had walked into the Colosseum."

Flanagan sat back and thought about that one. She liked it.

It started off with a punch, and followed up with a reference to the distant past. It was close enough to remind people of the famous SIMULAW cavemen, but still distinct enough to avoid litigation.

"All men were equal before the law. Contingency fees made legal services available even to the poor, and people throughout the developed world became increasingly aware of and insistent upon their legal rights. Led by the United States, western nations experienced a litigation explosion. Actions in contract and tort led to revolutions in civil liberties, workplace safety, and environmental protection."

She wasn't as happy with that one.

"But a more fundamental revolution was under way. Computers were creating the information society. By the late eighties programs had been designed for such different uses as medical diagnostics and stock trading. In fact, the stock market crashes of '87 and '99 were attributed, in part, to computerised trading."

Susan stopped and wiped the last sentence. The market programmers were very touchy. Even whispering the words "Boesky" or "Trump" in certain buildings would get you half a dozen civil actions. It was the modern equivalent of yelling "fire" in a crowded theatre.

Instead, she focused on the technical developments that had computerised law. It had been simpler than many people thought. Legal wording and phraseology had been developed over the centuries to eliminate many of the imprecisions of colloquial speech. The price had been to make legal jargon boring and incomprehensible to the lay person. But this same process had made it very easy to fit into software formats. Many legal processes, once commenced were predictable chains of notices, pleadings, and limitation periods.

The bell rang for an incoming call. It was John, her lover. She smiled at his face on screen, but it didn't smile back.

"Susan, we have to talk," his image said urgently.

"Can we do it later, John. I told you I'd be working today," she said with a hint of reproach in her tone.

"You're suing me!" he accused.

"It's not personal," she told him. "Now really, I'm in the middle of work, we can talk about it later."

"It's not personal," she told him. "Now really, I'm in the middle of work, we can talk about it later."

"Not personal!" he roared, "Not personal! what do you call personal if not —"

She cut him off. She called up her dateminder and fixed a note to call him when he calmed down.

On one of the screens, an out of sequence note told her that 67 per cent of the American population owned or leased SIMULAW or one of its competitors, which was roughly equivalent to a hundred and ninety million twentieth-century lawyers. The numbers continued to climb. She tagged it for an insert box.

The big problem had been in writing programs intelligent enough to apply real life incidents to legal process.

But the true revolution had come when these programs became available to the average consumer.

The litigation explosion had gone nuclear.

Suddenly, almost everyone used or had access to a personal legal programmer. More importantly than that though, they used it.

Her SIMULAW program beeped, attracting her attention. She fixed and forwarded. The latest lawsuit had been withdrawn, she prompted her own countersuits and reviewed the settlement return projections. Then she fed the results to her financial planner.

Nowadays 76 per cent of personal income was derived from lawsuits. Perhaps she should use that. North America's productivity had plummeted, but continual lawsuits had resulted in the more nearly uniform distribution of wealth than all of the social programs in history. Poverty was almost a thing of the past.

"Computers changed society in fundamental ways," she wrote.

"Incredible precision became the rule in mediums as diverse as art, music, and business. The concept of approximation vanished."

That was safely generic, she decided, she could slide it in anywhere. How to relate it to the subject . . .

There was an incoming call. She flagged it. It was John, again. Irritated she blocked it and initiated a second action against him for Telecommunications Harassment.

"SIMULAW systems made it possible to apply this precision to human relationships," she typed.

"Overnight, the social lubrication that had sustained humanity vanished. People simply no longer gave each other space. It was as if everyone had begun walking around with loaded guns pointed at each other, and trigger fingers started getting itchy."

She paused thoughtfully. It would be best to attribute this analysis. Preferably to someone who was already being sued. On the other hand, the part about loaded guns looked good. Maybe she should work the Wild West metaphor into it somewhere.

Susan toyed with the idea as she began her second cigarette.

It would put a more positive slant on the article, and emphasize SIMULAW as an ultimate expression of personal freedom and equality. Her program beeped again. She checked it. John had launched his own lawsuits against her.

Good. Maybe it would make him feel better.

"Constant litigation has changed the way people react to each other. Many kinds of crime have all but disappeared. To avoid lawsuits, elaborate forms of courtesy have emerged, but some feel that there is less human contact, less friendship, and people have become more isolated. Social paranoia has taken root."

Was that really true? She wondered.

"SIMULAW systems have made society more ruthless. Law ceases to operate as a moral force. People and organisations often choose to do what they want, factoring the costs of lawsuits as part of the price of doing

business."

Balance was all right, she decided, but she hardly wanted to sound negative.

Susan stopped and scrolled back. Something was missing.

She did some quick spots through her research base and spotted a promotional brochure from SIMULAW.

". . . formal legal systems had become hopelessly overloaded.

The courts simply could not cope with the volume of computer assisted lawsuits. Built in settlement features allowed the programs to negotiate out of court settlements, but real life and real time courts still had an impossible burden."

"SIMULAW solved the problem by creating SIMUCOURTS. Programs modelled on real judicial processes which computer assisted litigants could refer their disputes. Instant law could lead to nearly instant judgement. Of course, any real court could overturn a SIMUCOURT judgement, but studies had shown that a vanishingly small fraction did, so accurate was the software. The last barrier to the litigation explosion..."

Her console beeped, signalling it was time for a coffee break. Flanagan did a quick survey of related product liability, and health claims. She had had so many cups of coffee that she had reduced its potentially complex search and review spectrum to a few keystrokes. Assured that it was safe, she punched up a steaming cup of Sumatran Coffee.

She thought about John. Susan hoped that he wasn't too angry. She really liked him, and it was hard these days to find people who were really compatible. Something about her lawsuit had bothered him. She sipped her coffee. Perhaps she should drop it?

Susan dismissed the thought. If she withdrew the action things would never get resolved. John would just have to act like an adult.

The computer tone called her attention back to the console.

An opinion was ready indicating that an afternoon walk would offer minimal litigation exposure. Good. She backed out of SIMULAW and ordered a diagnostic check on her SecMan harness.

Then she punched up news of the world.

The big story was a class action suit, PEOPLE OF THE WORLD v. GOVERNMENT OF BRAZIL, ET AL. The decision finally had come down from the live Justices of the Brazilian Supreme Court. The Brazilian government was now committed to repairing the damage to its rain forests, the screen rolled through costs and tertiary awards.

America had achieved world supremacy in an unexpected way with the advent of PEOPLE OF BOSNIA v. WILLIAM CLINTON ET AL, back in 1998. Even though it was a "real law" case, it had extended American jurisdiction throughout the world, allowing literally anyone to sue anyone else in an American court. Third World leaders had used it to redress the perceived injustice of the world economic order, and had themselves been devoured by civil rights and pro-democracy lawsuits. Today, the Third world, with a lower level of litigation was pulling itself up to western standards, but the richer they became, the more lawsuits developed.

The destruction of the rain forests had been halted long ago, but the Brazilian government had dragged its heels for years. This decision was seen as a vindication for SIMULAW systems, as it was 97% on point with SIMUCOURT decisions.

A beep advised her that the diagnostic of her SecMan had been completed. It was in perfect working order. She turned to regard the heavy harness with its cameras, microphones, and biomonitors.

The need for an accurate record in litigation was vital.

Camcorder and audio recording systems had originally been restricted to things like business meetings. But as the litigation explosion went nuclear these recording devices had been installed in and around all personal homes, stores, offices, and public buildings.

The final step had been the SecurityMan harness which allowed people to carry recording devices everywhere they went, ensuring total coverage. Nowadays, almost nobody went out without their SecMan.

Susan was reminded of a book she had read once. "1984" by an Orwell or Blair or something. It had featured cameras everywhere recording everything for a brutal totalitarian state.

She had never seen the parallels others talked about. After all, the incessant cameras were there at the insistence of the individuals who constantly prosecuted or defended themselves from endless lawsuits.

She had never seen the parallels others talked about. After all, the incessant cameras were there at the insistence of the individuals who constantly prosecuted or defended themselves from endless lawsuits.

Cradle to grave recording was the price of the virtually unrestricted liberty the people of today enjoyed. The data could only be extracted by Court or SIMUCOURT order, and then only with due restrictions. She, for one, was glad to have the cameras.

Besides, she thought, unlike the book, she could turn off her holo at any time. All she had to do was be prepared to defend against an action for Unreasonable Restraint of Artistic Expression.

"1984" was no longer available. The SecurityMan corporation had succeeded in its suit of Retroactive Libel.

Over on the Holo the two cavemen were bashing each others heads again. She tried to ignore it.

Still, there was an interesting idea. Her fingers spun again.

"The hidden foundation of SIMULAW and its competitors is our faith in the all-inclusive pristine incorruptibility of the Evidence and Security databases. No court can make a reliable decision without reliable evidence, and even the suspicion of tainted evidence can undermine the system."

"Thus, not only must our Security/Evidence systems gather every piece of potential evidence, and store and retrieve it correctly, but the database must be pure, and be seen to be pure."

She stopped typing and stared at the screen.

Nice, Susan thought, a touch controversial but not especially litigable. She spent the rest of the morning working on the article. Then she put it through stylecheck, and finally had her SIMULAW program vet it for minimum litigation exposure.

Then she faxed it through and stretched out on her recliner. There was nothing like the satisfaction of a good days work.

On impulse, she called John. His face appeared on the screen, reserved and wary.

"I'm going for a walk in the park, would you like to join me?" she asked.

He seemed to think it over.

"Sure," he replied.

"But lets not discuss any lawsuits we have against each other," she suggested.

"All right," he agreed, "But you have to promise me that you won't sue me during our walk."

Susan hesitated, he was asking a lot. But then, didn't special people deserve special considerations?

"Fine," she told him, "I'll meet you at your place."

Smiling, they signed off. She loved the little dimples in his cheeks when he smiled. She sighed.

John was so reactionary sometimes. He seemed to yearn for the good old days and sometimes complained that the immense wealth of a technological civilisation should have a better use than supporting endless petty squabbles.

The modern age, she thought, was one of a clean environment, free of poverty and crime.

She loved him, but she couldn't see his point. To her, the old days were a litany of endless oppression. States oppressed their citizens, businesses oppressed their workers, husbands oppressed their wives, and parents oppressed their children.

Even the waiters were rude.

The modern age, she thought, was one of a clean environment, free of poverty and crime. The worthwhile parts of life hadn't changed, people still went for walks in the park. John argued that things could be achieved more cheaply, but he missed the point.

The founding fathers had understood that liberty had to be defended or it would be lost. Their principles had merely been extended to their logical conclusion. Freedom was based in the right to attack without significant personal risk or cost, anyone, anywhere, at anytime, for anything and everything.

She couldn't understand why John was so upset, simply because she was suing him for substandard performance in bed.

She pulled on her SecMan harness, and checked the latest updates for the Etiquette & Courtesy index. Stepping out of her apartment, she exchanged extremely polite greetings with her neighbour, Gladys. She set off down the street, into a beautiful sunny cloudless day, listening to the music of birds chirping.

To Susan Flanagan it was the best of worlds, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

Deep in the bowels of the SIMULAW corporations resident legal program, her article was being reviewed. Better safe than sorry the program decided, as it sued her.

☆

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It's been a 'HAL' of a year for Clarke

By
GREGG CHAMBERLAIN

While they live almost a world apart, Dr. Arthur C. Clarke, one of the world's best-known science fiction and science fact writers, and Douglas Rain, a distinguished Canadian Shakespearian actor living in Ontario, share two things in common.

Each is an extremely busy man, packing as much work and energy into his respective craft as is possible in the limitations of a day.

Both also are linked with 2001: A Space Odyssey, which many science fiction fans consider to be one of the best movies ever made and, thanks to the Oscar nomination that Clarke and producer/director Stanley Kubrick shared for it, proof that science fiction had emerged from the literary ghetto to which it had been consigned.

In the case of Clarke, the connection is obvious.

He wrote the short story, The Sentinel, which provided the foundation for the movie which he and Kubrick co-scripted and for the novel which Clarke authored — a novel which spawned three follow-up books: 2010: Odyssey Two, 2061: Odyssey Three and 3001: The Final Odyssey, as well as one movie sequel.

Rain's link is not quite as obvious.

The Canadian actor had a significant role in the first movie, yet his face was never seen or was his part identified in the credits — though his name was listed.

Photos by Paul Michaud

It's been a busy and productive year for Arthur C. Clarke — a year which started with the marking of his creation's, HAL 9000, supposed "activation date."

He provided the voice for HAL 9000, the computer which went on a killing rampage aboard the exploration ship, Discovery.

In Space Odyssey lore, Jan. 12, 1997, was the official date when HAL 9000 became active at the HAL plant in Urbana, Ill. During the weeks and months surrounding the date, both Clarke and Rain were besieged for comments about HAL 9000's birthday.

"I've been overwhelmed with interviews and questions on this," said the 79-year-old author from his home in Sri Lanka.

In addition to magazine and television interviews on the subject, MIT Press also brought out a book, HAL's Legacy, which Clarke thought said everything important about HAL and the future of artificial intelligence.

Recovering from a bout of pneumonia, Clarke provided a summary of the work that occupied his spare time, as well as his plans for the future.

Besides the latest Odyssey novel and the preface for HAL's Legacy, Clarke has been working on 52 episodes of Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious Universe for the Discovery Channel; helping develop Rama, a CD/ROM game based on his Rama series for

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Sierra Online and Sony Playstation; working on a radio presentation entitled, Seven Wonders of the World; a HAL's birthday video for MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology); a video for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory; writing new books like Greeting, Carbon-based Bipeds for St. Martin's Press, Trigger, with Michael P. Kube-McDowell for Bantam, and the Worlds of Alexander, a graphic book for BIG Corp.

Clarke is also shepherding several pieces of his fiction which have been optioned for film and television.

Among these pieces are: The Hammer of God for Paramount; Childhood's End and Childhood's End and A Fall For Moondust for Universal Studios; Rendezvous With Rama for Polygram; Skin Deep: An Eco-comedy for Turner Television; and a 26-episode series for YTV, entitled, The Deplorable Inventions of Arthur C. Clarke.

"I am overwhelmed with projects and very limited in time and energy," Clarke said.

I am overwhelmed with projects and very limited in time and energy.

Clarke has suffered from post-polio syndrome since 1984 and requires daily physiotherapy "which puts major demands on my time and energy. I can no longer walk unaided and need a wheelchair to move any distance."

His condition also requires that he nap every afternoon which has limited his working day to about 10 hours.

"Even with seven secretaries in three continents, dealing with mail and faxes absorbs so much time that there is very little left for writing.

"Nevertheless, if I can conserve my energies, I look forward to greeting 2001 — which I can't believe is only three years away."

Rain can sympathize with Clarke about having so much to do and so little time for it all.

He too shared Clarke's problem of being under siege about HAL's birthday. Rain explained that he had been "bombarded" with calls from American publications like The New York Times and Time magazine, as well as from CBC Radio and even the Australian media about his thoughts on HAL's birthday.

Rather than dwell on his past work, Rain prefers to stay focused on his next role (at the time of the interview, the portrayal of the blind prophet, Tiresias, in the Stratford Festival's production of William B. Yeats' stage adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus the King.

Rain's appearance as Tiresias marked his 31st season with the Stratford Festival. His past roles included: Shylock in The Merchant of Venice; the Walrus, Humpty Dumpty and the Gnat in Alice Through the Looking Glass; Henry IV, Parts I and II, as well as a host of other productions.

Rain's resume includes his portrayal of Caesar in Caesar and Cleopatra for the Shaw Festival, The Master Builder with Tarragon Theatre and a number of performances with the Canadian Stage Company, Centre Stage Company, Theatre Plus and the National Arts Centre.

Born in Winnipeg, Man., Rain studied theatre at the Banff School of Fine Arts and at the Old Vic Theatre School. He served as head of the English section of the National Theatre School from 1974 to 1977. He also directed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in 1973.

When Rain joined the original Stratford Festival Company in 1953, he understudied another actor with ties to science fiction, Alec Guinness, as Richard III.

Since then he has appeared in more than 50 productions on Broadway and other stages, as well as productions for Canadian television networks.

Rain has also taken his turn at swashbuckling in the role of D'Artagnan in Stratford's 1986 production of The Three Musketeers.

Clarke never met Rain during the production of 2001, but has the warmest regards for the man who gave HAL its voice.

There is one mystery surrounding the computer that even Clarke isn't able to solve — the discrepancy between the movie and novel versions of the book for when HAL 9000 officially came on-line. In the movie, HAL states that it became active on Jan. 12, 1992. In the novel, Jan. 12, 1997, is the activation date given. That date has since become HAL's official birthday.

"I have no idea why the dates were changed between the book and the film," Clarke says.

"After all, it was 30 years ago."

In his preface to HAL's Legacy, Clarke noted that when he was writing the novel, "I dimly recall choosing 1997 because it seemed close enough to the (possible) launch time for Discovery."

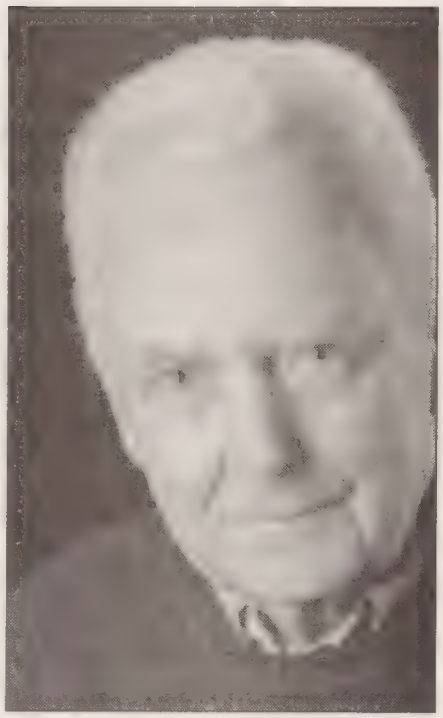
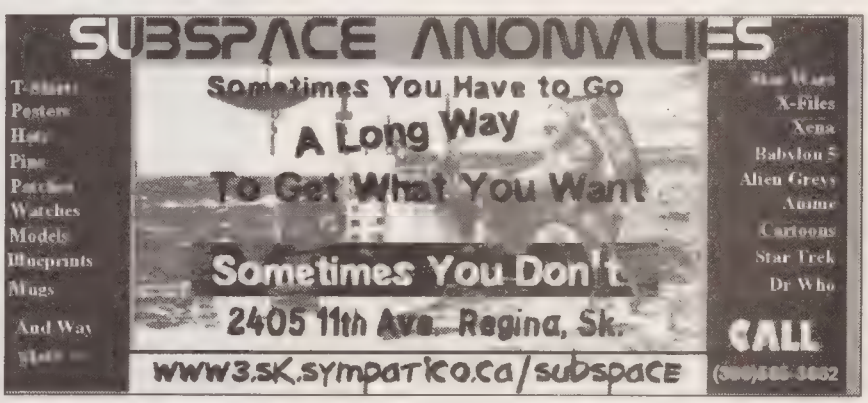


Photo by Terry Manzo

Canadian Shakespearian actor Douglas Rain provided the voice of HAL 9000.



Is Roswell book more disinformation?

There are three prevailing schools of thought about The Day After Roswell (Pocket Books).

One is that the author is a tale-spinning retired soldier who needs the income to supplement a meagre military pension. The second is that he is a master of disinformation, still working for the Pentagon and has chosen to assist in adding to the saucer myth in order to distract attention from matters the brass does not want the public examining detail.

The third is that he is a genuine whistle blower who believes the truth has been hidden far too long and selective exposure will mute the overwhelming shock when and if the government goes public.

Certainly, the man has impressive credentials, making it highly likely the second and third theories are most probable.

Col. Philip J. Corso was an army intelligence officer at the height of the Cold War, serving on Gen. Douglas MacArthur's staff in Korea and as a member of President Dwight Eisenhower's National Security Council as a lt. col. During his 21-year stint with the military, he was awarded 19 medals, ribbons and decorations for meritorious service. Since his retirement in 1963, he has worked for various private-sector business enterprises and as an advisor to senators James Eastland and Strom Thurmond on national security matters.

Recently, he testified before the House National Security Committee about American POWs held in North Korea.

Apparently the publication of this book caused something of a stir in Senator Thurmond's office. The senator, who was under the impression that the book would be a routine memoir, became thoroughly annoyed when he found out that it was on such a controversial topic as UFOs and Roswell.

Corso admits that he was not present at Roswell on July 4, 1947, and so he had to rely on existing published descriptions of the crash scene and anecdotal accounts from friends and fellow officers. One possible point of contention is that the aliens are depicted as resembling the typical modern "grays" often reported in modern day encounters and abductions (sketches in existing books on Roswell refer to more human-like entity).

Nevertheless, Corso does claim to have seen one of the alien bodies preserved in a thick blue liquid and stored in a glass container inside a storage crate.

Corso says he tried to bury the memory, regarding the body as horrible and fascinating simultaneously. He tried to rationalize it as a genetic experiment or some kind of circus freak. The memories resurfaced in 1961, when he was assigned to Gen. Arthur Trudeau's staff as a special assistant in research and development. A cabinet full of restricted material was moved to his new office and when he opened it, he knew at once they were some of the items recovered from Roswell.

According to Corso, two dark elliptical eyepieces were recovered that adhered to the lens of the eyes of the creatures. The fall-out from this? Just the night-vision goggles that the is currently in wide use.

In other words, one of the marvelous technological innovations was back-engineered from other-worldly technology. Some of the other benefits include fibre optics, the integrated circuit chip that makes up the modern computer and laser.

The balance of the book is taken up with the explanation of how the items from the saucer wreckage literally changed human history over the last 50 years.

In this respect, it reminds the readers of the defunct television series, Dark Skies.

The deepest secrets were supposedly kept classified by the expedient transferring of data to new hiding places at the first hint of trouble.

Among the fantastic revelations made is that the United States military wanted to have a manned lunar base no later than 1966. This was Project Horizon and was designed to counter similar inroads by the Soviets and (supposedly) extraterrestrial beings as well.

Corso provides a lot of interesting material about the early attempts of Yugoslavian-born Tesla to build a death ray as well as the thinking of the Pentagon on accelerated particle beam weapons.

Although there is a tendency of Corso to portray himself and his boss Gen. Trudeau in a heroic light, it is understandable if even one quarter of the material in the book is factual.

And therein lies the problem. How much information do we accept at face value, why this and why now? There are signposts pointing every which way. There is no question that it makes for interesting reading however. I particularly liked Corso's description of the UFO phenomena as the invisible elephant in the room that everyone knows is there and no one wishes to acknowledge.

Until we gain access to more facts, the book remains an enigma. Fascinating, but to be taken with a grain of salt.

— W. Ritchie Benedict

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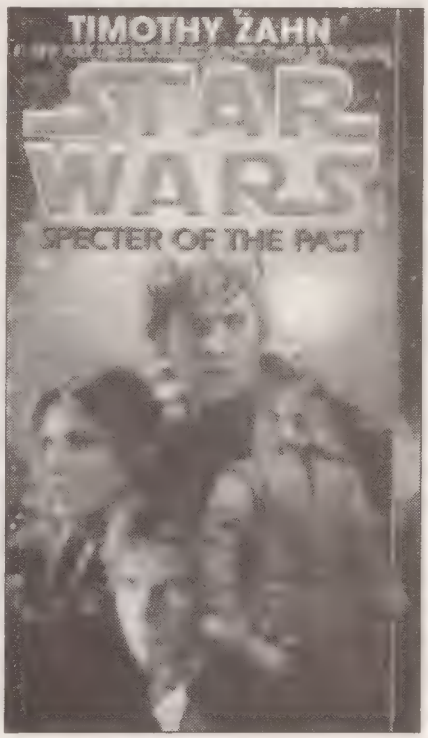


When it comes to Star Wars, Timothy Zahn is at the head of a long line of stellar writers.

After his best-selling trilogy a few years back, fans have been clamoring for his return to the universe of Skywalker. Spectre of the Past (Bantam) is just what they've been waiting for.

The novel reunites Luke and the gang, as well as Mara Jade and Karrde, Admiral Thrawn (?) and a new gang of villains who hope to shatter the New Republic and restore the Imperial forces to greatness through the revelation of a dark secret from the days of the war and through a daring plan.

It is Zahn at his best — and

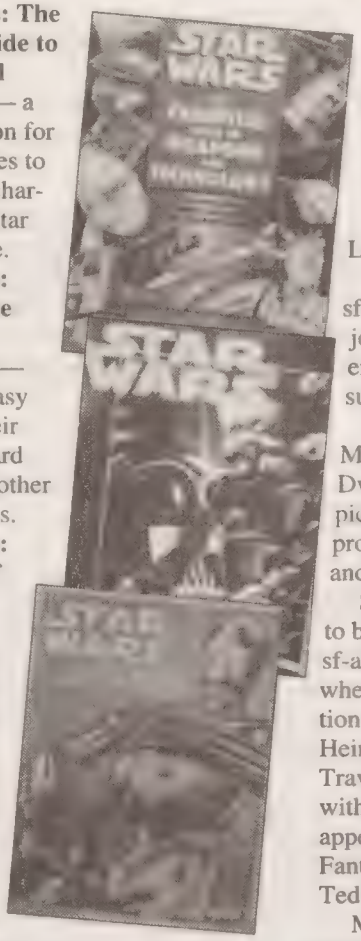
that's saying something.

He fills the book with plots and subplots, with treachery and deception, with heroic efforts and sacrifices. Zahn's strength has always been his understanding of the Star Wars universe and its characters. He is true to the characters created by George Lucas two decades ago. Even though his Star Wars output has been sadly scant since the last of his trilogy hit the stands in 1993, Zahn's characterizations feel and like he never stopped spinning yarns about the Skywalkers.

Thankfully, Spectre of Past is simply the first in another trilogy — a prelude to more greatness.

— Chris Krejlgaard

Other Star Wars books new to the bookstores:



Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Weapons and Technology — a fine companion for previous guides to vehicles and characters in the Star Wars universe.

Star Wars: The Art of the Brothers Hildebrandt — the sci•fi/fantasy artists turn their attention toward Tatoonie and other familiar scenes.

Star Wars: The Magic of Myth — the official companion to the Smithsonian exhibit marking the movie's 20th anniversary. The book details the influences on Star Wars and its influence on culture since 1977.

❑❑❑

Norman England following the First Crusade provides the backdrop for a battle for two mystical swords of power.

The country is being overrun by armies bent on destroying the last survivors of a sacred bloodline — a line that one of the Knights of Templar had sworn to protect.

John and Gwen learn that the leaders of these armies want the swords of power and only they and their few friends stand in the armies' way.

The Power in the Dark is an enthralling piece of fiction. Barry Mathias demonstrates a firm grasp of his characters and of the historical references that the book's plot hinges upon.

In a marketplace filled with second-rate characters and half-baked plots, Mathias' work stands out as an example of what historical fantasy can and should be like.

The book marks a number of firsts. It is the first novel for B.C. writer and teacher Barry Mathias and the first publishing venture for Victoria-based Salal Press.

If The Power in the Dark is indicative of their respective talents, both Mathias and Salal will have long, prosperous careers.

— Lars Johansen

❑❑❑

Absolute Magnitude. Warren Lapine and Stephen Pagel, (Tor).

It's a real pleasure to watch a good sf magazine become great. It's a real joy when that magazine has garnered enough great stories to bring out a sure-winner of an anthology.

I saw my first copy of Absolute Magnitude during a visit to White Dwarf Books in Vancouver in 1995. I picked it up because of the editorial promise of "good hard sf adventure" and I have never regretted the decision.

Sadly, there sometimes doesn't seem to be a place for the kind of rollicking sf-adventure stories that I could find when I first started reading science fiction. I cut my sf fan teeth on Heinlein's Have Space Suit, Will Travel and other such novels along with the more literary stuff that appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction and Ted White's Amazing.

Magazines like Absolute Magnitude fill the gap nicely. And the Lapine/Pagel edited anthology is a great introduction for anyone not lucky enough to find copies of AM on the shelves of their local sf bookstore. It has gems like Linda Tiernan Kepner's Planting Walnuts and Fermat's Best Theorem by Janet Kagan, and excellent mood pieces like Allan Steele's Working for Mister Chicago and F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre's haunting The Minds that Jumped and much more.

A good addition to anyone's private library.

❑❑❑

Secret Passages. Paul Preuss. (Tor)

Character driven science-fiction may be one of the hardest kinds to write. This is especially true when the science-fiction portion doesn't just play second-fiddle to the character studies, but ends up in the back of the orchestra with the triangle and the tubular bells.

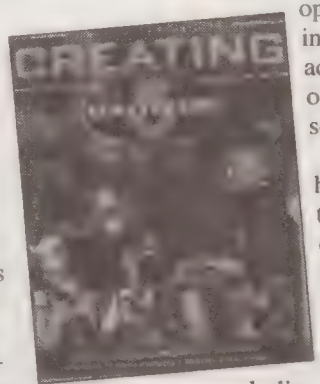
That said, Secret Passages is a good read. Paul Preuss's latest novel, set in the contemporary world rather than the future, is comparable to Charles de Lint's urban fantasies which also rely on well-realized characterization. Preuss' characters live and breathe. They're not just names and words on the pages.

The science aspect of the novel is interesting to contemplate. Preuss takes cutting-edge speculations on the nature of time and quantum physics and plays with them through the central character of Manolis Minakis. The secretive Cretan millionaire scientist reminisces about his own mysterious past, which involves the excavation of ancient and its legendary labyrinth, even as he constructs a figurative maze of scientific fact and fancy to capture an unorthodox American theoretical physicist using the man's own wife as the thread that leads him through the mental twists and turns.

— Gregg Chamberlain

❑❑❑

In the tradition of all those Star Trek behind-the-scenes books comes Creating Babylon 5 by David Basson.



The book offers fans an episode synopsis, photos, and interviews with the actors and creators of the long-running series.

For fans who have been unable to catch all the episodes — and we know who we are — the book is essential to understand the intricate plotline.

Next Issue

Matt Frewer,

Michael Moriarty

and the people beh

Psi Factor

Chronicles of the Pa al

Coming this winter

ALSO OUT

With six Nebula Awards and five Hugo Awards to her credit, Connie Wills doesn't disappoint with her latest novel, **To Say Nothing of the Dog,** (Bantam). Like her previous novel, Doomsday, Wills tackles the subject of time travel — this time to Victorian England — and the efforts need to repair the damage caused by a cat.

☆ ☆ ☆

Net Sci-Fi (Bantam) nice reference book, but it takes the fun out of surfing.

☆

Cross and the Crescent (Tor Books/H.B.Fenn) as historical fantasy goes, this doesn't.

☆

Four small feral wizards must save New York from the surreal horrors unleashed through the gates beneath Grand Central Station. **The Book of Night With Moon** (Warner/H.B. Fenn) may be torture on rush-hour commuters, but not on the reader.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Katharine Kerr has scored on all counts in previous segments of the Deverry series, she maintains her track record with **The Red Wyvern** (Bantam).

☆ ☆ ☆

You knew it had to happen, David Brin's **Infinity Shore** (Bantam), is now in paperback.

☆ ☆

Poul Anderson takes on Viking kings and warriors in **War of the Gods** (Tor/H.B. Fenn), since Parsec's publisher is part Dane, he decreed the book gets . . .

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Piers Anthony manages to offer a tale of mirth and magic in **Faun and Games** (Tor/H.B. Fenn). But he doesn't manage to do it too well.

☆ ☆

Gothic Ghosts (Tor/H.B. Fenn) provides best-selling authors at the top of their game.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Scale:

☆ leave it on the shelf
☆ ☆ if there's nothing on the tube
☆ ☆ ☆ few things better in life
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ the basis for a library

Recall to Vietnam

By
GREG VAILLANCOURT

The game's premise is fine, it's the quality of the picture where Soldier Boyz suffers

The basic premise of the game Soldier Boyz is that a powerful rich man wants his daughter rescued from the jungles of Vietnam where her plane was shot down by a liberation group (of what is not clear).

Who he finds to execute the rescue is not your average group of mercenaries. The big man goes to a youth detention camp where he meets Tolliver (a camp counsellor? I don't think so!). Tolliver agrees to rescue the daughter but only if the troubled youth are allowed to go along. Those that survive will get a full pardon.

The idea is that a group of troubled youths from L.A. can get the job done just as well as professional soldiers, and those that live through it get a second chance.

Overall, the game's controls are incredibly bad. It doesn't matter if you use the joystick or the mouse. The graphics which are FMV's (full motion video's) are interspersed with the crosshair of whichever gun of whichever gang member you currently are portraying.

Also something you should take note of is that you run out of ammunition in seconds due to the poor controls, so death is inevitable and very repetitious.

The graphic quality is very poor due to the pixelicious feel they present. For those not familiar with this term, it generally means that the image quality gets worse as the camera zooms in thus revealing a highly pixelized image that is very hard to, or sometimes impossible to, distinguish. The result being that sometimes you can't tell the back from the front of someone's head.

Woe be the day when I would say the acting was the best part of the game, but it is definitely the case here (and that is definitely not a compliment). The good acting is done by Cary-Hyroyuki Tagawa, best known for the film Mortal Kombat and his role on the television show Nash Bridges.

He's the evil bad guy who shot down the plane and is holding the rich man's daughter captive. The other decent acting job is by Michael Dudikoff from the film American Ninja and the television show Cobra. He's the camp counsellor, er, prison warden, Tolliver.

The rest of the acting is mostly done by bit players, including your crew, and consists of grunts, groans and a few odd parlour trick scenes.

I should mention what this game is good for and I think I have found its true calling. Soldier Boyz would be perfect for the video arcade where these shoot-em-ups, done movie style, are very popular. Also, the endless replays, hyper-active action and endless violence are synonymous with arcades and those who spend their time and money there.

If any of you recall, there was a game similar in style to this one called A Fork In The Tale done by a company

called Anyriver.

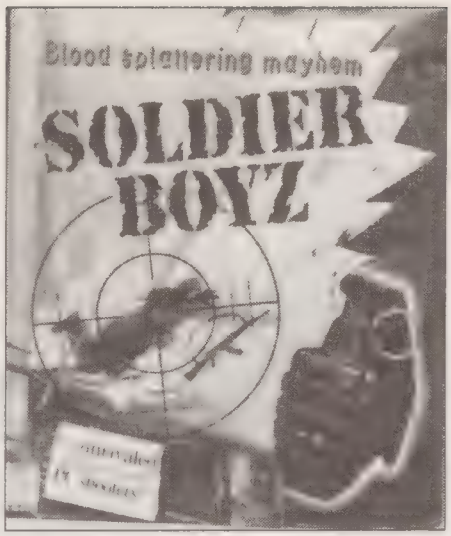
The company was started by a guy who broke off from Electronic Arts and thought the full motion video concept was the way to go in making games. What's wrong with that is that FMV's are not games. They only work as cut-scenes or for special effects. Sometime soon maybe other game companies will see this and not push FMV beyond its usefulness.

Otherwise they will learn the same way Anyriver did. They went belly-up due to high costs, extensive delays and extremely poor sales.

The difference with this game is that it was made in conjunction with a film and when the game's sales go south, as I and many others predict, at least they can go back to making movies and leave the game making to those who know something about games and more importantly, what customers like and are willing to pay for.

One last comment, the game was made during the shooting of the HBO film of the same name, so if you really need to see the blood, guts and gore, don't do it through crappy FMV and endlessreplays of missions.

Watch the film instead. It only takes two hours and you'll be glad you finally got it out of your system.



Soldier Boyz requires that your computer meet these minimum requirements before you can play: IBM PC or compatible, 486DX/66 processor (or better), 8MB RAM minimum (16 RECOMMENDED, 16MB required for Win 95), double-speed CD-ROM drive (or better), MS-DOS 5.0 (or better) or Windows 95 / DOS 7.0, free hard drive space = 28MB for maximum install (recommended) or 11MB for minimum install and a joystick or a mouse.

☆ Greg Vaillancourt's software reviews appears in each issue of Parsec

Skate into the past

Fans of the NHL are some of the most loyal and knowledgable in all of professional sports. A lot of fans follow certain players from team to team and could be considered loyal to that player.

Players like Wayne Gretzky, Teemu Selanne, Pavel Bure and Sergei Federov generate all kinds of support no matter who they play for.

Well, as good as these players are for the continued success of the NHL, nothing comes close to the solid fan base built from the very beginning of the NHL for the Original Six.

The Original Six (New York Rangers, Montreal Canadiens, Boston Bruins, Toronto Maple Leafs, Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Blackhawks) started play 70 years ago and over those 70 years many things have occurred.

And so to celebrate the anniversary of each of the teams, an interactive multimedia CD with the complete history of each team (complete that is up to this year) has been released by ReadySoft with the official license of the NHL (showing its approval).

For each team, you will get to know the original players, the Hall of Famers, the founding fathers of the team and of the NHL and even a tour of the rink.

What makes all this a multimedia experience is that the information isn't presented in a dull text based scrolling list, its presented in many different formats to catch your attention and keep it.

You can also take part in a trivia game (if you really think you know everything about the team) or see photos of the team from long ago or even check out the biographies of the hall of famers, but by far the most impressive thing included is the stats on every single player who ever played for the team (wow!).

Hard core fans will really enjoy these multimedia CDS while the average fan might want to pick one up to learn more about the greatest game on ice.

System Requirements are:

For PC: 486 or higher CPU 4 MB of RAM (8 MB of RAM recommended) Mouse 2X CD-ROM Compatible audio board Compatible VGA display (256 colors or more) Microsoft Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 For Apple Macintosh: 68030 processor or better 4MB of RAM (8MB of RAM highly recommended) 2X CD-ROM 256 colours 13 inch colour monitor or larger System 7.0 or higher

LucasArts releases Masters of Teras Kasio

SAN RAFAEL, Calif. — The 3D fighting game genre fulfills its ultimate destiny with LucasArts Entertainment Company's Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi, an intense multiplayer fighting experience for Sony PlayStation. Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi presents Star Wars in a way never before seen, uniting Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Princess Leia as they battle the likes of Boba Fett, Tusken Raiders and Gamorreans in a series of fierce hand-to-hand contests set in a variety of spectacular 3D arenas.

Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi centers on the mysterious Arden Lyn, a master of Teräs Käsi, an ancient martial art as old as the Jedi Knights themselves. Like a Jedi Knight, a master of Teräs Käsi also harnesses the Force, but with a very different philosophy. Arden Lyn is bent on destroying the Rebel Alliance, and at the behest of Darth Vader, leads a group of the most feared champions of the Galactic Empire whose sole purpose is to eliminate the leaders of the Rebel Alliance in one-on-one contests.

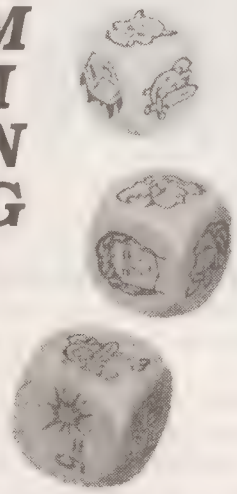
"Masters of Teräs Käsi is an absolute dream come true for fans of 3D fighting games because Star Wars lends itself so well to this genre," says Tom Byron, product marketing manager at LucasArts.

"The raw action, life-like movement and slick game control are the types of features that take these games over the top. Masters will be no exception."

☆

Settings flaw handful of new releases

GAMING NOTES



By
JUSTIN MOHAREB

At a recent convention, shortly after the ritual beating of the RPG columnist by trek fans, I was approached by a terrifying figure. Clothed in crimson and black, with a fiendish goatee (they used to be fiendish, once upon a time). He handed me a bundle of books and said I think you should review these in your next column.

"Thanks, Chris," I replied, glad to finally meet my editor. I don't suppose you've got my cheque with you?

With that, the figure glowered at me and disappeared into the crowd. I moved to follow him, but was distracted when I was pursued by a horde of Babylon 5 fans.

Oh, the hazards of an RPG columnist.

When I regained consciousness, I looked at the bundle I'd been handed. I unwrapped it and found that they were RPGs. Grateful I hadn't been mistaken for the Anime columnist again, I began to look them over.

I must offer the reader a warning; I've never been the biggest fan of science fiction roleplaying games. I passed over Star Frontiers in my youth, mock Traveller fans to this day (mock, mock, mock), and enjoy an occasional game of Star Wars, but it's not REALLY SCI-FI.

So, imagine my shock. It appears that SCI-FI is making a bit of a renaissance in the RPG field. This month, I review no fewer than five new sci-fi RPGs.

The newest of the lot is Alternity from TSR.

Using a heavily mutated variant of their AD&D rules, Alternity is a game that allows players to adventure in a variety of futuristic settings; it allows for settings from a near future/cyberpunk setting to far flung, galaxy spanning adventure.

Alternity's rules are fairly familiar to any player of D&D. Players create their characters based on a concept, then choose a career(class) and profession (just what they do). It uses the standard attributes (wisdom & charisma changed to will & personality), and has a not too bad skill system.

There's also an advantage/disadvantage system, thrown in for good measure.

The central mechanic is a simple one (roll d20, modified by another die as decided by the Rules Master to be either a bonus or a penalty). Depending on the roll, it will be an ordinary, good, or amazing success. Or a failure.

The setting is rather brief, since this is the players guide to Alternity (the Dunge . . . Rules Master book is doubtless necessary to play, but the rules in this book seem fairly complete). There are a number of alien races listed (including a group of warrior poets. Shocked me, too).

There's a fairly good gear section, with equipment divided between Progress levels (were in 5, and the rules go up to 7) and types (computers, guns & armor, and everything else).

Alternity does a good job of putting forward a sci-fi answer to AD&D, i.e. a genre rpg that can cover a lot of things in that genre fairly well. With expansions to the cybernetics, mutations, and psionics sections, it could handle pretty much anything. A good GMs screen will doubtless be vital, but the system is relatively clean, with the problems that marred AD&D cleaned up.

Fading Suns, from Holistic Design Inc., is a far future space fantasy game. It details a dark future, where humanity has risen to heights undreamed of, and lost it all. Its the dark ages in space, complete with Arab barbarians (joy). While this game could easily have sailed on seas of cheese, its actually quite good.

Characters are point generated, using classes. There's a nicely done selection of Psionic powers & miracles (church is very powerful during the Dark Ages)

The system is fairly simple.

Characters are point generated, using classes. There's a nicely done selection of Psionic powers & miracles (church is very powerful during the Dark Ages). All tests are made with d20s (thank God, cause I've got reams of the things lying around).

The class system in this game doesn't annoy me as much as they usually do.

The four different types (aliens, merchants, nobles, and priests) give you pretty much every kind of character you'd care to play. Except serfs, but there's only so much you can take of tilling the soil.

The setting, I love.

Aeon (now Trinity) isn't [illegible] science fiction, and su[illegible] from the lack of a jump[illegible] off point for new campaigns.

Millienia in the future, a new republic is being rebuilt. The various groups (the church, the merchants, and the noble houses) struggle for supremacy. The magical elements are nicely done; the miracles could just be fancy psi powers, after all. The evil monsters could be standard sci-fi bad guys. Or, they could be evil creatures from the pits of hell.

The games title comes from a strange effect that's spreading across the galaxy. The stars are starting to fade. Not just blink out or go supernova, but just . . . fade.

Another new sci-fi game, this time from White Wolf Game Studio, is Trinity. Originally titled Aeon, this game is a tale of psionic heroes in the early parts of the 22nd century.

The system is a variant of the standard storyteller rules. It's been cleaned up, getting rid of many of the major flaws, particularly those dealing with botches and successes.

It follows White Wolf's standard rules for chargen, with characters belonging to one of a number of groups; in Trinity, characters are members of various psionic orders, depending mostly on their power. While it is conceivable that a clairsentient might join the ranks of Norca, they will likely join up with ISRA.

One of the core campaign ideas for the game is that Abberants, homicidal psis expelled from Earth a century ago, have returned to wreak their vengeance. Standing in their way are the psions, psionically empowered humans.

Each psion has a power group they specialize in, whether it be telepathy, clairsentience, or one of five other power groups. There won't be any cross-over characters here; you can, for a high cost, get a single power outside of your group.

Trinity isn't terribly hard sci-fi. It's more like Legion: The Superheroics, and the powers are justified with a wave of the quantum wand. And it suffers in that there's not really any jumping off point for new campaigns.

The milieu as presented is huge, spanning (literally) galaxies.

In most of White Wolf's games, you're provided with a sample campaign setting, to give you a grounding in the game.

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Trinity doesn't do that, although they could have if they'd dumped the uninspiring fiction piece at the beginning and used that 20 pages for a campaign base. As it is, it'll be fairly difficult for newer gamers to just leap in and start adventuring (the game lacks any definite focus), but experienced players shouldn't have that much trouble with it.

Another recent SCI-FI game, this time from Archangel Entertainment, is Zero.

In it, you play a biomechanical who has lived its entire life as part of a hive mind, the Equanimity, under Zero, the hive mother. One day, you're separated from the hive.

Welcome to individuality.

Characters in Zero all start out with at least one ability, telepathy. They choose more abilities (there aren't any attributes in Zero. I assume that all Biomechs are probably physically identical) from the list of 21.

With each new ability, their focus value goes up. Checks are made using

Zero has some interesting art (artist Steve Stone drew the world of Zero, and Lester Smith wrote the game around it), although I do wonder about the chick, errr . . . young woman, with the needle nipples on page 64. Visually, the game is tightly laid out, and well edited.

Zero's main playability weakness lies in its lack of concrete background. Vague mention is made to past events: traps laid for Zeros followers in a great war (by who? What was the war for?); and Androids created by Zero to serve her (why?).

Some people might think this is a good thing. I prefer to have at least a vague outline. Who was Zero at war with? They still out there? How did Zero set up her little subterranean cyber-kingdom, anyway? Why did she do it? You won't find any of these questions answered in the main book.

In conclusion, none of the four games reviewed above suck (the game I was most looking forward to reviewing, Blue Planet from Biohazard Games, didn't arrive in time thanks to the postal strike). They're all SCI-FI in different settings (from the inhuman world of Zero to the dark ages far future of Fading Suns to Trinitys superheroic world that's a century and a bit away and Alternity's more generic brand of sci-fi), but none of them seem to have a capital "S" on their science.

Of them all, Fading Suns is the one that has the greatest rush to it.

It delivers an interesting setting with a lot of adventure potential, with a good system with no major flaws.

☆ Justin Mohareb wishes to apologize for not mentioning Ed Greenwood in his last column., and will personally buy Mr. Greenwood dinner to apologize. If Mr. Mohareb finds steady work, perhaps it will be somewhere with napkins. This is doubtful.

Rebels, Empire square off in strategy game

San Rafael, Calif. – The Galactic Empire and Rebel Alliance forces dramatically collide in Star Wars Rebellion, an epic strategy game from LucasArts Entertainment Company. Rebellion presents a real-time competition of galactic expansion and domination pitted against survival and resistance in the Star Wars universe.

Unlike previous Star Wars games from LucasArts, Rebellion places players in the role of strategic commander of all resources, planets and forces controlled by the Galactic Empire or Rebel Alliance.

The character-driven game can be played in single-player or head-to-head mode and immerses players in a variety of strategic and tactical challenges. To succeed, players must satisfy specific victory conditions. For instance, those fighting for the Empire must capture Luke Skywalker, Mon Mothma and destroy Rebel headquarters.

Players taking up the Rebel cause can win by capturing Darth Vader, the Emperor Palpatine and overthrowing the Imperial Seat at Coruscant.

"Star Wars has provided LucasArts with a universe full of possibilities," says Tom Byron, product marketing manager for LucasArts.

"A deep strategy game like Rebellion offers a tremendous opportunity for LucasArts to broaden the Star Wars universe into other genres."

The setting for Rebellion is the time just after the conclusion of A New Hope in which the Rebel Alliance has dealt a decisive blow to the Galactic Empire by destroying the first Death Star. Only temporarily thwarted, the Galactic Empire regroups to continue its relentless pursuit to crush the Rebellion while the Alliance has rallied galaxy-wide support for its noble cause.

Domination of the galaxy is one of the primary objectives in Rebellion. The universe is divided by sectors and systems (or individual planets) and can be tailored by size for longer or shorter sessions, from 100 to 200 systems (10 to 20 sectors of 10 systems each). Players command all the major strategic aspects of their side, including managing production resources, military production and deployment and conducting political and espionage activities.

While galactic domination is key to successful gameplay, Rebellion is also about loyalty. The path to winning is through building a strong allegiancy of planets, which ultimately translates into control of the galaxy. Players can win a planet's loyalty either through diplomacy or battle victories. Use of force can be very effective, but players run the danger of a planet resenting control and rancorous planets can easily shift allegiances.

Star Wars Rebellion gameplay breaks down to two basic parts, strategic and tactical. The strategic component is where players make the majority of decisions, including manufacturing, resource management, fleet deployment, mission assignments and exploration. Players are updated on events by their droid "agents" (C-3PO for the Rebel Alliance and IMP-22 for the Galactic Empire).

When two opposing fleets meet over the same system, the tactical component automatically kicks in. In this separate game element players can join ships that have been deployed into task-forces or fighter squadrons, and assign orders or targets. All of this takes place in a real-time 3D space-combat "engine" that is moving as soon as the conflict is joined, so while the player is making decisions, so is the computer or opposing player.

Another unique characteristic of Rebellion is that it is heavily character driven. Each side has a wealth of characters – drawn from the Star Wars mythology – at its disposal. Taken from all over the Star Wars universe, players can expect to make use of the talents of such well-known characters as Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Darth Vader.

An undeserved 'Bad Boy' reputation

By
EMRU TOWNSEND

Read about Ralph Bakshi and within the same sentence you'll probably see him referred to as the "bad boy" of animation (see, I just did it now).

It's a title he's earned.

Many of his heavily urban feature films, such as Heavy Traffic, Fritz the Cat, and Coonskin have come under fire for being sexist, racist, and misogynist.

Under his aegis, even the relatively tame Mighty Mouse and the rest of his Terrytoons pals gained an edgy, subversive streak in the sadly short-lived New Adventures of Mighty Mouse TV series.

When people start taking shots at poor Ralph, I point them to what is probably my favorite of his productions: Wizards.

Wizards concerns a post-apocalyptic Earth, where magic—and, to a lesser degree, science—exist side by side. Blackwolf, an evil sorcerer, is using technology and WWII propaganda to mount a devastating campaign of conquest. Avatar, a reclusive wizard, is drawn into the war against the encroaching forces of Blackwolf, who happens to be his evil twin brother.

Joining Avatar in his half-hearted quest is Elinore, the buxom and scantily-clad princess, who is studying magic under him; Weehawk, the gung-ho warrior; and Peace, a robot assassin ensorcelled by Avatar after he kills the president in Avatar's home.

A simple description of the rest of the film would sound pretty straightforward: our heroes travel great distances, are captured, escape, make allies, endure great peril, and eventually reach Blackwolf's lair so that Avatar can confront his errant brother.

It's no great surprise that Avatar kills his brother, and the good guys escape just as Blackwolf's stronghold falls apart.

What is a surprise is just how much fun this movie is. It's as if Bakshi realized that there's very little new in the fantasy/quest genre, and decided to use it as a backdrop on which to hang other stuff.

First is the character design. Most of the characters look like they've been lifted right out of one of Vaughn Bodé's underground comics—you almost expect to see the Cheech Wizard or Cobalt 60 strolling by. Although streamlined for animation, the characters have the same kind of quirky appeal that make Bodé's characters so much fun. The only trouble is, Bodé's name is nowhere in the credits, and yet the movie definitely owes a debt to him. Shame on you, Ralph.

© Ralph Bakshi

Despite the reputation gained from Fritz the Cat (top), Ralph Bakshi has also worked magic on such productions as Lord of the Rings and Wizards.

Avatar puts a delightful spin on the standard all-knowing wizard/leader character.

He seems less like Gandalf or Merlin and more like a tired, old New Yorker who spends half his time muttering to himself while everyone else scurries around excitedly. It's almost as if he's saying, "Look, I'm a good guy and the main character. I can't lose. Why should I get worked up?"

One aspect of Wizards sure to annoy some animation purists is Bakshi's trademark over-reliance on rotoscoping (a process by which live-action film is traced over.) While not as bad as some of his other films (in particular, Lord of the Rings is badly afflicted by rotoscoping), it still gets tiresome after a while.

There are a few truly laugh-out-loud scenes sprinkled throughout Wizards, but really, everything is designed to get at least a chuckle out of the audience. While the film is a little bit dated (it was released in 1977), it's still worth the price of rental. If you like your fantasy with a generous touch of levity, go have a look and see if Ralph deserves a break.

★ Emru Townsend is editor of fps: The Magazine of Animation on Film and Video.

Sidebar

Vancouver agency provides specialists

By
GREGG CHAMBERLAIN

When the scenes in Hollywood's latest action-adventure flick need "punching up" a bit, who do directors call?

When the space marines need a few good men and women to help fight off alien marauders, where do they get new recruits?

When Highlander's Immortals need a few extra heads to lop off, who volunteers?

In Vancouver they call the Cobra Team. Nino Caratozzolo, Dennis Keeton and John Sampson are the minds behind Cobra Team talent, a special skills agency based in Burnaby, B.C., a suburb of the Greater Vancouver District.

Cobra Team talent represents more than 60 men and women with military, SWAT, martial arts and stunt work experience.

Since Cobra Team talent set up shop two years ago, the agency has had its specialists booked for appearances in a variety of television shows, including sci•fi series like Sliders, the X-Files, The Sentinel and Highlander: The Series, and in feature films like Underworld.

Caratozzolo, the veteran acting member of the trio and the agency's director, came up with the idea of Cobra Team talent after working for a special skills agency that got him only two jobs during the year he was part of its talent stable.

"We (he and Keeton) had worked for another company," Caratozzolo said, "and we felt we could do it better and we had something to offer the film and T.V. industry, which was special skills excellence."

A special skills extra is a step up from an ordinary extra who is part of the background scene.

"We're not just extras," Caratozzolo said. "It (special skills) is anything that requires skill. Not just, say, 'girl on phone' or 'man behind pool table.'"

Cobra Team talent has carved out a niche in the "Hollywood North" film industry by providing trained extras versed in military, police and/or martial arts skills. Keeton, tactical advisor and team leader, is a sergeant in the Canadian Armed Forces Reserves while Sampson, the stunt co-ordinator, served in the U.S. Special Forces.

They can call on a list of armed forces reservists (including 20 who served tours of duty in Bosnia), off-duty police and actors trained in weapons and stunts to field a realistic-looking militia unit, bomb squad, SWAT team, futuristic mercenary group or whatever the script calls for.

Since Cobra Team talent set up shop two years ago, the agency has had its specialists booked for appearances in a variety of television shows, including sci•fi series like Sliders, the X-Files, The Sentinel and Highlander: The Series, and in feature films like Underworld.

The professional attitude of Cobra Team talent has earned the agency a lot of praise from extras casting directors.

"That's what separates us from our competitors," Caratozzolo said. Keeton added that Cobra Team members bond together while on a shoot to help maintain group and individual discipline.

"We expect a lot of our guys," he said, noting that Cobra Team people don't goof around while waiting on the set. "We always have discipline on the set."

The agency's teams are usually on sets half-an-hour at least before the start of shooting.

"It goes back to the team concept," Caratozzolo said. "You're as strong as your weakest link." Andrew Hedge is cited as an example of the dedication and professionalism of Cobra Team members.

Hedge spent an eight-hour day on the set of an episode of The Sentinel television series, awaiting his turn in front of the camera. After his shoot was done, Hedge rushed to hospital to have emergency surgery for an internal disorder and then spent four days in recovery. The rest of the group on the set didn't even know at the time that he was sick.

"He never said anything and his performance (on set) never suffered,' Caratozzolo said. "His girlfriend called us on the set to explain what had happened and to say he was sorry he wasn't able to say bye to us."

"A lot of guys are dedicated like that," Keeton observed. "You have to lead by example." He recalls on night shoot he and Caratozzolo had to stay on a set until first light. Their scene still wasn't shot but they got paid for being ready to go. Keeton knows of people in the extra business who would grumble about wasted time.

Caratozzolo said another advantage Cobra Team talent has over other agencies is the large number of special skills extras it can provide on demand. The agency proved that soon after its creation when a call came in from the Vancouver production office of Highlander: The Series.

"Highlander called us and in three days we had to 31 guys together," Caratozzolo said. The episode involved several period setting flashbacks involving Duncan MacLeod with the Cobra Team people dressed as an 1800s British Military unit.

"It was a lot of fun," Keeton said. "It got us away from the Swat stuff plus there were so many of us on the set."

Calls to portray SWAT and U.S. militia/special forces units provide the bulk of work for Cobra Team talent. But some of those calls, especially for sci•fi film and T.V. projects, provide opportunities to demonstrate the agency's other strengths.

"We are the only agency with actors versed in special skills too," Caratozzolo said.

An early assignment for the sci•fi movie, Virtual Assassin, saw he and Keeton portraying SWAT officers who had computer implants inside their heads as part of the buddy system used by a futuristic police force. The movie's villain was the living host for a computer virus. When confronted by the SWAT team, the bad guy infected the officers' neuro-links with the virus.

"We all became demented and opened up on our own people," Caratozzolo laughed.

The scene involved a closeup of Caratozzolo and Keeton as they writhed around on the ground and shot at people. Caratozzolo, who had the most acting experience, took Keeton aside before shooting began and explained to him how the computer virus might affect their characters if the situation existed in real life.

Their performance proved better than they expected.

"It got to a point," Keeton recalled, chuckling, "the camera crew liked it so much, the director said to cut to the crew and, while we're writhing on the ground, they're holding up number cards, with 9.5, 10, 9.5 etcetera on the cards and they're clapping."

The Love Gods episode of Sliders shot during the second season of the series' production in Vancouver demonstrated another of Cobra Team talent's strengths. The storyline, which saw the Sliders land on a world where men are an endangered species and kept in government breeding centres, required an all-female police force, including an emergency response team. Cobra Team talent was the only agency which had a large enough roster of trained female special skills extras to fill the bill.

The agency is recruiting more women and people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds to meet all possible project calls and to also increase opportunities in the special skills field for women and ethnic minorities.

"That's something you see a lack of on T.V. series is policewomen when actually there are a lot of them out there in the real world," Keeton observed.

One of Cobra Team talent's female members, who works on the Vancouver police drug squad, is being groomed to become the team leader for the agency's female squad.

As more and more movie and television producers discover Vancouver, Cobra Team talent expects lots of repeat calls for its specialists.

For some of them, being a special skills extra might even prove to be the foot in the door to an acting career. ☆

Want to be a cobra?

In the office of Cobra Team talent on the 19th floor of a Burnaby apartment building, a videocassette player runs a 10-minute tape showing excerpts from the Nisei episode of The X-Files interspersed with cuts from one of the made-for-T.V. Jack Reed police procedural mystery movies.

Black-clad ninja-style commandos crash through plexiglass quarantine doors of a mobile biological research lab; a police SWAT team kicks down wooden doors in a raid on a dangerous drug dealer's ghetto fortress; a U.S. special forces unit rams through metal doors of a secret detention centre and marches the alien-like internees to a mass grave site. "As you can see we break a lot of doors," chuckled Nino Caratozzolo, Cobra Team director.

Useful Information

As part of its drive for excellence, Cobra Team talent runs its own training program for prospective applicants to teach them whatever basics they don't already know as part of their new career as special skills extras.

Tactical supervisor Dennis Keeton notes that what a new recruit needs to learn depends on what his or her past experience is before joining Cobra Team.

"A lot of the things people class as stunt work," Keeton said, is "a lot of what my guys can already do from their military training and background."

The training program encourages recruits and Cobra Team veterans to share the special skills they have. The program also includes practice in breaking down doors.

"There is a technique involved in that," Caratozzolo said. "Doing it so you don't get hurt or hurt anyone else." Doors on a film set are rigged to be broken in.

"But if you hit it wrong it could come back and hit you or fall the wrong way." Keeton observed. Also the script may call for using a battering ram. A standard police or military-style battering ram weighs anywhere between 35 to 70 kilograms (75 to 150 pounds). Cobra Team members learn how to work as a team using a hand-held ram against a door. Age is not a barrier to becoming a special skills extra. Cobra Team talent has members ranging in age from 17 to 63.

"As long as they're still pretty active and they're able to run around, climb stairs and such," Keeton said. Senior Cobra Team members are in demand for scenes which require skills extras to portray high-ranking and veteran military and police officers.

The perfect special skills candidate would have a background in either military, police or martial arts. Police auxiliaries or armed forces reservists would also qualify. The candidate must also have experience in either handling weapons or in some other field like mountain or rock-climbing/rappelling, outdoor survival, riding horseback or recreational motor vehicles or other skills, such as handling a lariat, which might be useful as part of a film script.

Cobra Team talent recruits learn set etiquette and safety, and are expected to conduct themselves on the job in a professional and polite manner and demonstrate proficiency and patience.

"They have to have a good attitude," Keeton said. "We've turned away people with great skills because they have a bad attitude," Caratozzolo said.

If you live in the Vancouver area or other parts of B.C. and are interested in becoming a special skills extra, contact Cobra Team talent at 1-604-431-5929 or send an inquiry, including a current photo and a resume listing vital statistics and special skills, to Suite 1903-5885, Olive Ave., Burnaby, B.C., V5H 4N8.

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Columnist misses Canadian contributors

Dear Editor,

Your gaming columnist Justin Mohareb should check his facts before he rants.

Canadians have made substantial contributions to the gaming industry and are recognized as some of the best in the business.

He refers to David Pulver and the late Nigel Findley, both excellent writers and mentions DreamPod Nine and Daedalus Games. There are, however, other "serious" Canadian companies. Columbia Games, formerly of Vancouver, moved to Washington (state) only because it was more convenient to ship from there; its principals and designers still are and have always been Canadian.

Other Canadian companies — with Canadian offices and designers — include: RAFM (miniatures); Peregrine Publishing (RPGs) and Global Games (tabletop rules and miniatures). I think all of these companies (and not just DP9 and Daedalus) would consider themselves "serious" companies.

As for Canadian gaming writers, Mr Mohareb neglects to mention — or perhaps he is unaware of — Ed Greenwood whose Forgotten Realms setting for TSR is the best selling world in the RPG industry. Nor does he speak of Robin Laws, the designer of Daedalus's Feng Shui RPG as well as a major contributor to FASA's Earthdawn line; Robin has also worked for Atlas Games, Mayfair, Pinnacle Entertainment and Steve Jackson Games. Then there is Karl Wu who wrote Shadowtech, Fasa's best-selling Shadowrun supplement ever (more than 60,000 copies sold, a phenomenally high figure for the gaming industry).

Some of the others he does not mention are Sean Punch (line editor Gurps SJG), David Graham (SJG, DP9), Caroline Julian (SJG), Kevin Brennan (GDW), Chris Hind (WW), Alex von Thorn (TSR, SJG, AH).

Canadian artists are also represented in the gaming industry — Kevin Davies (TSR), Denis Beauvais (TSR), Karl Wu (R. Talsorian). Moreover, a number of Canadian authors have written novels set in various game worlds such as Tanya Huff (TSR), Don Bassnigthwaite (WW), Edo von Belkom (WW) .

With most RPG settings not on this planet, let alone in one part of the North American continent, I do not think Canada or Canadians "get the shaft" in every existing game world as Mohareb claims Some U.S. companies such as Pagan Publishing and Chaosium have published adventure supplements with Canadian settings.

If Americans write about a Canada separated from Quebec in the future history scenarios, it means at least they are paying attention to our news .

Game companies do not ignore Canada: if a writer comes up with an interesting book or adventure topic it will be published. Americans are not the only ones with misconceptions. Canada does "get her due on the gaming stage".

Finally, sometimes we do get our products later than the US but certainly not as late as Europe or Asia. I do not know where he buys his games, but most US game companies give Canadian distributors exchange rates that are on average five per cent lower than the banks give. So in many cases it is less expensive to buy a game in Canada than it is to exchange Canadian money for American and buy the same game in the U.S.

Merle von Thorn
Toronto

Merle von Thorn is manager of The Worldhouse.

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Series dared to walk in dream dimension

By
GREGG CHAMBERLAIN

NBC's latest entry into science fiction includes some well-known names and a hefty price tag

Photo by Paul Drinkwater: © NBC

The cast of Sleepwalkers have mysteries to solve, they just have a rather unique way of doing it.

Sleepwalkers, NBC's latest entry in the science-fiction/thriller genre, proved to be one of the most original series concepts ever.

The pilot was shot in Los Angeles but the rest of the initial 12-episode run was shot in Burnaby and features B.C. native Bruce Greenwood (Nowhere Man, St. Elsewhere) as neurophysiologist Dr. Nathan Bradford, founder of the Morpheus Institute, described as "a cutting-edge research facility dedicated to the study of dreams and their mysterious link to the waking world."

A joint production of NBC, Columbia TriStar Television and Three Putt Productions (producers and series co-creators Stephen Kronish and David S. Goyer), the premise of Sleepwalkers concerns a group of researchers engaged in the study of dreams.

What separates their work from the regular question-and-answer interviews of psychological studies is that they have the technology to enter into the dreams of their subjects.

"I think we're the first television series ever to delve so deeply into dreams," said Goyer (The Crow: City of Angels). "Viewers have been taken to the centre of the earth, to the edge of the universe, even travelled in time, but they've never really been taken inside their own minds.

"The unconscious is the true final frontier. And as our viewers will come to learn, what's inside us can be the most dangerous place of all."

Series co-creator Kronish (The Commish, MacGyver, Wiseguy) said the various storylines will explore a wide variety of areas related to or touching upon dream research such as past-life experiences, historically-based dreams, traditional nightmares, and whimsical flights of fancy.

Not all the plots aim at inspiring terror though that will also be a part of Sleepwalkers, within limits.

"In a sense it's an investigative show," said Kronish. "There is a mystery to be solved. We want all our stories to have an emotional basis, though. I think that the 'scares' will only work when you take the human element and trust it."

Among the five-member ensemble cast, three have a personal interest in the show's premise.

British-born Kathrin Nicholson, whose family lived for awhile in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., used to sleep-

walk when she was a child.

"My parents tell me that I did it with my eyes open. I would walk around the house and end up sitting at the end of their bed, talking about the day's events, and then return to my own bed."

Sleepwalkers is Nicholson's debut as a series regular. Her past credits include guest roles on the daytime dramas Days of Our Lives and General Hospital, the action series Renegade, and the award-winning sf anthology series The Outer Limits.

Her character, Gail Bradford, is the comatose wife of Dr. Bradford, the reason behind his drive to create the Morpheus Institute. The only time they can talk to each other now is during shared dreams.

I think Gail represents the heart of this show. She is like an angel, Nathan's saving grace, strength, and inspiration.

"I think Gail represents the heart of this show. She is like an angel, Nathan's saving grace, strength, and inspiration. Although some of my actor friends can't resist teasing me that, after all my theatrical training, my big break finds me spending most of my time in a sleep chamber."

Jeffrey D. Sams found part of his own life unfolding before him on the pages of the pilot script. The episode includes a dream in which a faceless shadow pursues a young man, an intriguing parallel to a recurring dream which has haunted Sams since childhood and which holds a prominent place in his personal dream journal.

"The shadow is less defined in my dream. It only occurs when I sleep on my back. The only time it left was when I was in college. As soon as I graduated, the dream came back."

Sams' past credits include the role of Eat Moe in the Tony-nominated Broadway musical, Five Guys Named Moe, supporting parts in films like Waiting to Exhale, and as a series regular in Medicine Ball and Courthouse. After reading the pilot for Sleepwalkers, Sams felt he was born to be Ben Costigan, an Air Force pilot who becomes a dream researcher.

"This is a role that was meant to come my way. Ben is a family man. He thinks quick on his feet because of his combat experience, but he wants to make a difference, to give back to his country. By being part of this research team, he has a chance to make the world a better place."

Naomi Watts' character, Kate Russell, is a dream interpreter and expert on cross-cultural mythology. Which may be appropriate for an actor with a personal fascination about dream study.

"I have terrible nightmares, very complex dreams. It's been very interesting to pore over dream books in my research for this role."

The Australian actor, whose family is originally from Kent, England, has played mostly sidekick roles during her early film career. She was Jet Girl, the partner of Lori Petty's Tank Girl character in the film adaptation of the post-apocalyptic comic series of the same name. Other roles have been in movies like Under the Lighthouse Dancing, Gross Misconduct, and Dream Factory, and the television mini-series, Brides of Christ.

"I think Kate is a very strong, independent woman and wants to be on the same level as the men that she works with. However, she is also very warm and grounded, nurturing, with a sense of humour."

Abraham Benrubi, who plays Vince Konefke, the institute's likeable polysomnograph technician, grew up in Indianapolis, Ind., reading Spiderman comics and watching Star Trek. He spends his adult off-hours nowadays reading science fiction along with surfing the 'Net and listening to alternative music.

Before coming on board Sleepwalkers, Benrubi had been a regular on ER as admissions clerk Jerry Markovic and on the short- lived comedy series Parker Lewis Can't Lose along with performing in supporting roles in movies like The Shadow, Twister, and George of the Jungle. He looks forward to some amusing moments on Sleepwalkers.

"Vince is a glorified machine-monitoring boy. I imagine that as my character develops I will be able to provide some comic relief—probably when they enter one of my dreams, there will be a lot of humour."

Heading the Sleepwalkers cast means coming back home to Canada for Bruce Greenwood, star of the critically-acclaimed but short-lived Nowhere Man series which was also shot in Vancouver. Born in Quebec, raised in New Jersey and British Columbia, Greenwood first came to the attention of television viewers as the amorous Dr. Seth Griffin on the hospital drama, St. Elsewhere. He's a doctor again but this time the character's personality is a touch more grim.

"Dr. Bradford is private and driven," Greenwood observed. The Canadian actor comes to Sleepwalkers after starring in The Sweet Hereafter, a Cannes Film Festival award-winner, which he described as a welcome change of pace from his usual work.

"My character is the moral centre of the film, a nicer guy than I usually play." Sleepwalkers is budgeted at a minimum of $1.5 million (US) per episode. X-Files' David Nutter directed the pilot episode and is consulting producer for the remainder of the series. Sleepwalkers is labor-intensive and not just in terms of its five-member ensemble cast. The series features two staff writers, David Weinstein and Jonathan Kaplan, and seven directors who alternate between episodes.

☆

Canadian author wins contest

Victoria, B.C., writer, Morgan Burke has claimed the grand prize in the L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future contest.

Burke is the first Canadian writer to claim the honor.

His story, A Prayer for the Insect God, is a futuristic tale of robotic cockroaches. It was praised as "pretty much a perfect story" by judge Dave Wolverton.

The awards ceremony took place at the Kennedy Space Centre and featured such guests as Wolverton, Jack Williamson and Poul Anderson.

Burke's story appears in L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future, Volume XIII.

June 5-7, 1998

Ad Astra XVII: The Radisson Hotel, Toronto East Don Valley. Scheduled guests: N/A; Registration: $30 until Dec. 30, $35 until May 15, $40 at the door. Information: P.O. Box 7276, Station A, Toronto M5W 1X9 or http://aries.phys.yorku.ca/~white/adastra.html

Sept. 25-27

Concept 98: Montreal; Hotel: N/A; Scheduled guests: Robert J. Sawyer, Mark Shainblum, Gabriel Morissette; Registration: $20 until March 31. Information: P.O. Box 405, Station H, Montreal, PQ, H3G 2L1.

inCONsequential: Fredericton, N.B. Hotel: Lord Beaverbrook Hotel; Scheduled Guests: David Feintuch, Christian J. Ready; Registration: $25 until Dec. 31, $30 until June 30, $35 at the door. Information: 403-527 Beaverbrook Court, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 1X6

Nov. 6-8, 1998

Primedia: Holiday Inn Toronto-Markham. Scheduled guest: Walter Koenig; Registration: $25 until March 15, $30 until Sept. 30, $40 at the door. Information: 1403-33 King St., Weston, Ont., M9N 3R7, (905) 820-3844 or http://www.interlog.com/~kcozens/primedia/

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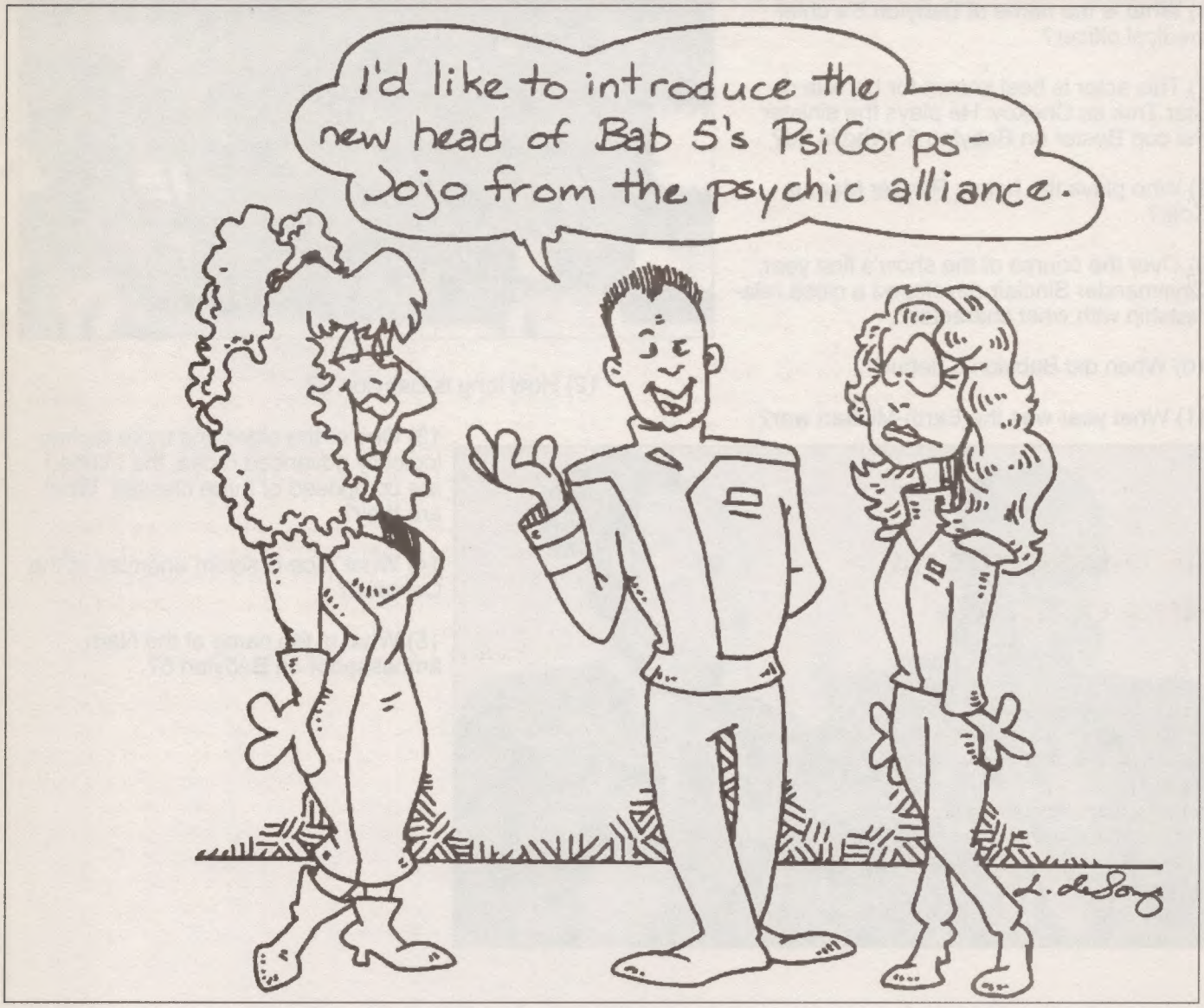


OK, these aren't too hard — especially if you're a frequent viewer of Babylon 5 — just consider it a Christmas present from the gang at Parsec

1) Who created Babylon 5?

2) The Babylon 5 Advisory Council comprises of what representatives?

3) What is the name of the security chief?

4) What is the name of Babylon 5's first commander?

5) What is the name of Bruce Boxleitner's character?

6) What is the name of Babylon 5's chief medical officer?

7) This actor is best known for his role on Star Trek as Chekov. He plays the sinister Psi cop Bester on Babylon 5. Who is he?

8) Who plays the heroic Ranger Marcus Cole?

9) Over the course of the show's first year, Commander Sinclair developed a close relationship with what character?

10) When did Babylon 5 debut?

11) What year was the Earth-Minbari war?

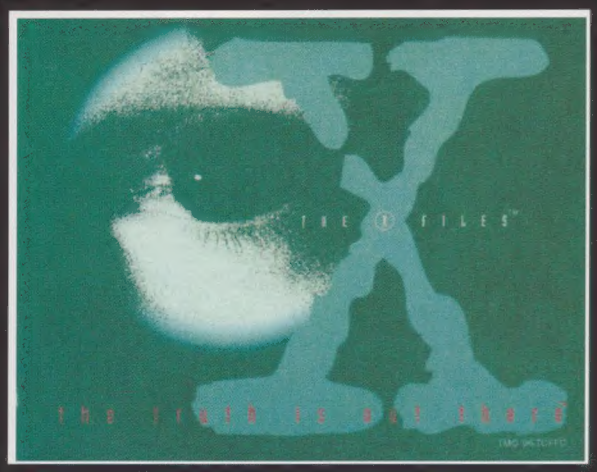
12) How long is Babylon 5?

13) One of the older and more technologically advanced races, the Minbari are composed of three classes. What are they?

14) What race is sworn enemies of the Centauri?

15) What is the name of the Narn ambassador on Babylon 5?

Canada's X-Files Headquarters



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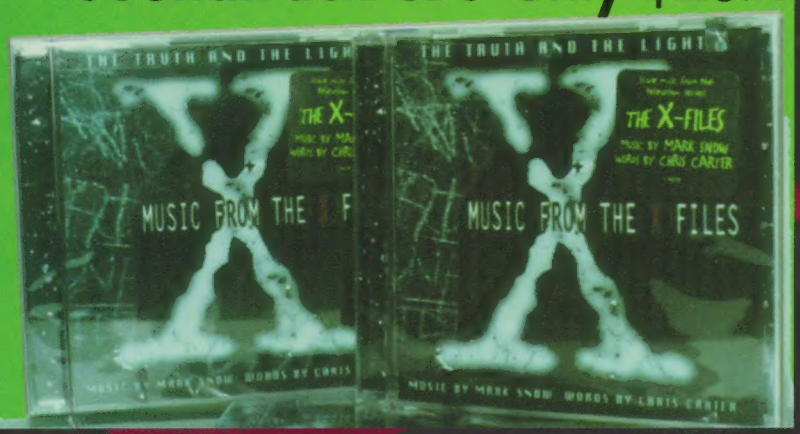

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